

December 5th, 2025

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend a meeting of the

Mid and East Antrim Environment and Economy Committee

to be held on **Monday, 8th December 2025 at 6:30 pm** in **Council Chamber, The Braid, 1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena and via remote access.**

Yours sincerely



Valerie Watts
Interim Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Agenda

1 NOTICE OF MEETING

2 APOLOGIES

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and Officers are invited to declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, including gifts and hospitality, they may have in respect of items on this Agenda.

4 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION

4.1 DAERA Draft Consultation on Unlicensed (Recreational) Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters - Circulated

- 📎 *DAERA Draft Consultation on Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters Regs 2008.pdf* Page 1
- 📎 *Appendix 1 Consultation Document - Review of Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters.pdf* Page 3
- 📎 *Appendix 2 MEABC Consultation Response.pdf* Page 12
- 📎 *Appendix 3 - The Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008.pdf* Page 15

4.2 Glenarm Regeneration Plan Sub Committee Meeting Notes – 11 September 2025 - Circulated

- 📎 *Glenarm Regen Sub-Committee Meeting Notes -11 Sept 2025.pdf* Page 19

4.3 Town Centre Revitalisation Scheme Update - circulated 03.12.25

- 📎 *Town Centre Revitalisation Scheme Update.pdf* Page 23

4.4 PEACEPLUS General Update - circulated

- 📎 *PEACEPLUS General Update.pdf* Page 29
- 📎 *Appendix 1 - Mid and East Antrim Local Action Plan.pdf* Page 31

4.5 Economic Development Activity Report - Circulated

- 📎 *Economic Development Activity Report.pdf* Page 40

4.6 Consultation from DfE on a Sustainable, Regional Approach for the Production, Storage, Transport and Use of Hydrogen as a Fuel - Circulated

📎 *Consultation from DfE on a Sustainable, Regional Approach for the Production, Storage, Transport and Use of Hydrogen as a Fuel.pdf* Page 47

📎 *appendix 1.pdf* Page 51

📎 *appendix 2.pdf* Page 74

4.7 Labour Market Partnership Update - circulated

📎 *Labour Market Partnership Update.pdf* Page 84

4.8 LEP General Update - circulated

📎 *LEP General Update.pdf* Page 90

📎 *Appendix 1 - Draft Regional Balance Fund Letter of Offer.pdf* Page 94

📎 *Appendix 2 - Annex to Regional Balance Fund Letter of Offer.pdf* Page 104

5 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

6 TABLED QUESTIONS

Closed Committee - In accordance with Council policy, representatives of the Press will not be in attendance for this section of the Meeting.

7 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION – CLOSED COMMITTEE

7.1 Rural Development Grants - Report to follow

7.2 Cemetery Provision in Carrickfergus Area Update - circulated 03.12.15

📎 *Cemetery Provision in Carrickfergus Area - Update.pdf* Not included

📎 *Appendix 1 - Map 1 Trooperslane Site, Carrickfergus.pdf* Not included

📎 *Appendix 2 -OKT Valuation dated 8 August 2025_Redacted.pdf* Not included

📎 *Appendix 3 - Map 2 - 16 acre site off Trooperslane, Carrickfergus.pdf* Not included

📎 *Appendix 4 - Map 3 - Whinfield Lane & Montgomery Land.pdf* Not included

7.3 Capital Plan Q2 Update - circulated

Capital Plan Update Q2 FY25-26.pdf

Not included

Appendix 1 Capital Plan 25-26 Q2.pdf

Not included

7.4 Amateur & Grassroots Sporting Organisations Improvement Funding Update - circulated 03.12.25

Amateur and Grassroots Sporting Organisations Improvement Funding.pdf

Not included

Appendix 1 Current Status of Projects.pdf

Not included

7.5 City Deal Quarterly Update - Circulated

City Deal Quarterly Update..pdf

Not included

7.6 St Patrick's Barracks Quarterly Update - Circulated 05.12.25

St Patricks Barracks Quarterly Update.pdf

Not included

7.7 SEUPB PEACEPLUS “Smart Towns and Villages” Programme Update - circulated

SEUPB PEACEPLUS Smart Towns and Villages programme update.pdf

Not included

Appendix 1 Connexus Project Locations and Activity.pdf

Not included

Appendix 2 SEUPB PEACEPLUS Decision letter_Redacted.pdf

Not included

8 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – CLOSED COMMITTEE

Open Committee

9 DRAFT FORWARD PLAN FOR ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY COMMITTEE - circulated

E&E Committee - Forward Plan.pdf

Page 107

Council/Committee: Environment and Economy

Date: 08 December 2025

Report Title: **DAERA Draft Consultation on Unlicensed (Recreational) Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters**

Publication Status: Open

Author: Ryan Hack, Harbour Master

Approver: Shaun Morley, Interim Director of Operations

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to seek Elected Members approval of MEABCs response to the DAERA Draft Consultation on Unlicensed (Recreational) Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters (Appendix 1)

2. Background

- 2.1. The Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 permit individuals to fish for certain species of crab and lobster in Northern Ireland's inshore waters without a commercial license, with conditions. Recreational fishers are allowed to use up to 5 pots, catching 1 lobster and 5 crabs per day per boat.
- 2.2. The consultation sets out proposals including a registration requirement for recreational crab and lobster fishers, a pot tagging requirement, and a catch recording arrangement. It provides an opportunity to remind those in the recreational sector of conservation measures which the Department has enacted since the 2008 Regulations came into operation.
- 2.3. The overall objective behind the proposals is to improve the management and sustainability of crab and lobster stocks in the Northern Ireland waters. The consultation opened on 1 October 2025 and will close on 24 December 2025.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The consultation focuses exclusively on unlicensed (recreational) fishing for crabs and lobsters, which is not governed or controlled by the Council. It contains 4 questions, which are not all relevant to the Council.
- 3.2. Overall, Council is supportive of the proposals in the Consultation. The changes proposed would have no expected negative impacts on Council

but would likely improve governance of recreational fishing for crabs and lobster within some Council-managed areas.

- 3.3. Council would like DAERA to consider developing a reporting system for instances where pot lines become a hazard to vessels and/or when fishing gear gets washed on shore.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. **Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan** – supporting this draft Bill will link to strategic objectives in the Corporate Plan (Planet pillar) and 'environment' cross-cutting theme in the Community Plan.
- 4.2. **Legal** – this draft Bill will modernise, streamline and give effect to Northern Ireland's Fisheries and Water Environment Protection policies so that these are consistent and more robust.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. It is proposed to seek approval of the draft response to this consultation and submit it to DAERA prior to the deadline of 24 December 2025.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. It is recommended that under delegated authority of the E&E committee, Elected Members;
 - (i) Note the DAERA Draft Consultation on Unlicensed (Recreational) Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters (Appendix 1).
 - (ii) Approve the draft response (Appendix 2) to this consultation.

7. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 Consultation Document – Review of Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters

Appendix 2 MEA Draft Consultation Response

Appendix 3 The Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobster Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008

Link to consultation:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-unlicensed-recreational-fishing-crabs-and-lobsters>

Consultation Document

Introduction

The Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 (*the 2008 Regulations*) permit individuals to fish for certain crab and lobster species in Northern Ireland's inshore waters **without a commercial fishing licence**, but under specific conditions.

The 2008 Regulations allow unlicensed (recreational) fishing for edible (brown) crab, velvet crab, spider crab, green crab, and lobster and are designed to restrict the scale of such activity to prevent commercial-scale exploitation under the guise of recreational fishing.

Recreational fishers are limited to the use of 5 pots and the catching each day of 1 lobster and 5 crabs per boat. The 2008 regulations were a first step in managing recreational and part-time fishing activity. They did not include a requirement for registration, pot tagging, or catch recording and reporting.

Consultation

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) invites views on proposed amendments to the existing arrangements for recreational fishing for crabs and lobsters in Northern Ireland.

The consultation sets out proposals include a registration requirement for recreational crab and lobster fishers, a pot tagging requirement, and a catch recording arrangement.

The consultation also provides an opportunity to remind those in the recreational sector of conservation measures which the Department has enacted since the 2008 Regulations came into operation.

The overall objective behind the proposals is to improve the management and sustainability of crab and lobster stocks in the Northern Ireland waters.

Context and Rationale

The Department has a statutory obligation to prepare and publish a fisheries management plan for non-quota shellfish species in Northern Ireland. The work thus far in developing this plan has underlined that there is no existing data on the scale or impact of recreational potting activity on crab and lobster stocks in Northern Ireland.

This data gap presents a challenge going forward for evidence-based policies for management of these important shellfish stocks.

These proposals are considered as a first steps towards addressing that gap.

By introducing a light-touch regulatory framework, the Department aims to gather the information necessary to assess the scale of this recreational activity and its ecological implications.

The proposed measures which are the subject of this consultation are therefore precautionary in nature, designed to improve traceability, support future stock assessments, and ensure that all fishing activity (commercial and recreational) is contributing to the long-term sustainability of these valuable species.

Existing arrangements elsewhere

The management of fisheries in the English 0-6 nautical mile including the permitting arrangements for recreational potting, falls under the jurisdiction of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs). These regional organisations were established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and are responsible for the sustainable management of sea fisheries resources within their respective districts.

Recreational Potting Permits

Several IFCAs have established permitting arrangements for recreational potting activities to regulate the scale and impact of such activities on marine ecosystems. These permits are intended to manage the use of pots for catching crabs, lobsters,

and other shellfish species, ensuring that recreational fishing does not adversely affect stock levels and the overall health of the marine environment.

The Southern IFCA requires individuals who engage in recreational potting to obtain a permit. The permits are issued with specific conditions, including limitations on the number of pots that can be used and the species that can be caught. The aim is to prevent overfishing and ensure sustainable practices.

The Northumberland IFCA has introduced a permitting system to regulate the number of pots and the frequency of their use. This approach helps to monitor the impact on local shellfish stocks and maintain ecological balance.

The Devon & Severn IFCA also implements a permit system which includes guidelines on pot usage, catch limits, and reporting requirements to track the activity and its effects on the marine environment.

The permitting arrangements serve several important purposes:

- **Traceability:** Allows IFCAs to maintain records of individuals engaged in recreational potting, facilitating better monitoring and enforcement.
- **Sustainability:** Ensures that recreational potting activities contribute to the long-term health and stability of shellfish populations.
- **Data Collection:** Provides valuable data on potting activity, catch rates, and stock levels, aiding in informed fisheries management decisions.
- **Compliance:** Helps IFCAs enforce regulations and promote responsible fishing practices among recreational fishers.

Permitting arrangements for recreational potting by IFCAs are considered an effective tool for managing the impact of these activities on marine ecosystems.

By requiring permits, the IFCAs can ensure that recreational fishers adhere to sustainable practices, contributing to the conservation and long-term viability of shellfish stocks in their districts. These measures not only support the ecological balance but also enhance data collection to inform future fisheries management policy.

Republic of Ireland

The European Union has amended its Fisheries Control Regulation on recreational fisheries. From 2026, recreational fishers in EU Member States (including Republic of Ireland) will be required to be registered and record and report electronically catches of species and stocks that are subject to conservation measures which apply to recreational fisheries.

This is part of a broader effort to harmonise data collection from recreational fisheries, helping to close long-standing knowledge gaps about their impact on fish stocks. The EU is rolling out an electronic system called *RecFishing* to make reporting easier and more consistent across its Member States.

The regulation also includes provisions for recreational fishers for marking passive fishing gear such as pots and creels which are commonly used for crabs and lobsters. These marking requirements will assist to combat unreported and illegal fishing and to reduce the impact of any abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear on marine life and ecosystems.

Summary of Proposed Amendments

1. Registration requirement for Unlicensed (Recreational) Fishers

All individuals fishing for crabs and lobsters without a commercial licence would be required to register with DAERA and apply for a permit for recreational pot fishing.

Purpose:

- To quantify and establish a clear record of participant numbers in the recreational sector;
- To enable effective communication and compliance monitoring; and
- To support future policy development and stock management.

2. Pot Tagging Requirement

Unlicensed fishers would be issued with 5 uniquely numbered tags to be attached to each pot. The tags would enable pots belonging to recreational fishers to be identifiable and distinguishable from those used by commercial fishers.

Purpose:

- To control the number of pots deployed;
- To reduce the risk of gear conflict and ghost fishing; and
- To improve traceability and enforcement.

3. Catch Recording Arrangement

Registered unlicensed fishers would be required to submit periodic catch returns, including details of the species caught, quantities, and fishing effort.

Purpose:

- To begin building a dataset on recreational and part-time fishing activity;
- To inform future stock assessments and conservation measures; and
- To promote responsible fishing practices

Existing measures for recreational fishing for crabs and lobsters in Northern Ireland

Unlicensed (hobby) fishing	
Maximum no. of pots	5 per day
Daily catch limits	1 lobster and 5 crabs per boat
Other conservation measures	
Brown Crab	Minimum size 150mm
Velvet Crab	Minimum size 65mm
Spider Crab	Minimum size 130mm
Lobster	Minimum size 87mm
Berried Brown Crab	Prohibition on landing etc.
Removal of eggs from berried brown crab	Prohibition
Retaining berried brown crab in a stock cage	Prohibition
Soft-shelled brown crab	Prohibition on landing, possession, sale etc.
Detached claws brown crab	Prohibition on landing
V-notched lobster	Prohibition on landing etc.
Lobster with mutilated tails	Prohibition on landing etc.

Contravention of these measures are considered an offence under Part 8 of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966.

Any person guilty of such an offence shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine.

Use of AI software

By responding to the consultation, you consent to the transfer of your responses to questions from CitizenSpace to DAERA. Your responses might be processed by a third party. We may use artificial intelligence software to support our analysis process

Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the introduction of a registration process for unlicensed crab and lobster fishers to apply for a permit? Please provide details why you would / would not support this proposal.

YES ☐ NO ☐

2. Do you support the introduction of a pot tagging system to distinguish between pots deployed by recreational and commercial fishers?

YES ☐ NO ☐

3. Do you support the requirement for recreational fishers to submit catch records?

YES ☐ NO ☐

4. Are there alternative approaches to gathering data on recreational potting that should be considered to enable more complete stock assessments to be conducted?



DRAFT

How to Respond

Responses should be submitted by [insert deadline] via:

- Email: seafisheries@daera-ni.gov.uk
- Post: Sea Fisheries Policy Branch
Rathkeltair House
Market Street
Downpatrick
Co. Down
BT30 6AJ
- Online form: [\[insert CITIZEN SPACE link once live\]](#)

Next Steps

Following the consultation period, DAERA will review all submissions and publish a synopsis summary report and a Departmental response.

The Department may then consider bringing forward amendments to the 2008 Regulations.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the introduction of a registration process for unlicensed crab and lobster fishers to apply for a permit? Please provide details why you would / would not support this proposal.

YES ☒ NO ☐

Council supports the introduction of a registration process to gain a permit for unlicensed crab and lobster fishing. Having fishers registered with the governing body will mean that there is a greater understanding of the levels of fishing around the inshore waters of our coastline.

2. Do you support the introduction of a pot tagging system to distinguish between pots deployed by recreational and commercial fishers?

YES ☒ NO ☐

Council supports the tagging of pots and would query if a reporting system could be included for instances where pot lines become a hazard to vessels and/or when fishing gear gets washed on shore.

3. Do you support the requirement for recreational fishers to submit catch records?

YES ☒ NO ☐

Council supports the inclusion of catch recording. This is vitally important to ensure that species are not over fished and that there will be data regarding the population densities in our waters.

4. Are there alternative approaches to gathering data on recreational potting that should be considered to enable more complete stock assessments to be conducted?

N/A

DRAFT

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STATUTORY RULES OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2008 No. 185

SEA FISHERIES

The Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobster Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008

Made - - - - - *24th April 2008*

Coming into operation *30th May 2008*

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development makes the following Regulations in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 124(1) and (2) of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966⁽¹⁾.

Citation and commencement

1. These Regulations may be cited as the Unlicensed Fishing for Crabs and Lobster Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 and shall come into operation on 30th May 2008.

Interpretation

2. In these Regulations—

“the Act” means the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966;

“crabs” means spider crabs of the species *Maia squinado*, velvet crabs of the species *Necora puber*, edible crabs of the species *Cancer pagurus* and green crabs of the species *Cancer maenas*;

“day” means the 24 hour period commencing at midnight on one day and ending immediately before midnight on the next following day;

“licensed fishing vessel” means a fishing vessel in respect of which a licence has been issued under section 4 of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967⁽²⁾ or under similar fisheries related provisions by another Member State or by the appropriate authorities in the Isle of Man or by another country;

“lobster” means lobster of the species *Homarus gammarus*;

“Northern Ireland inshore waters” has the same meaning as in the Fisheries (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2001⁽³⁾;

⁽¹⁾ 1966 c. 17 (NI); section 124 was amended by Fisheries (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2001

⁽²⁾ 1967 c. 84; section 4 was amended by the Fishery Limits Act 1976

⁽³⁾ 2001 c. 4

“pots” means any pot, receptacle or container with one or more openings or entrances and which is capable of being left at sea to catch crabs or lobster;

“stock cage” means a containment device used to store live crabs or lobster at sea or in the waters of a port or harbour.

Prohibition of retention or landing

3.—(1) A person shall not land, bring to land or retain on board a boat more than the number of lobster and crabs permitted each day for each boat.

(2) For the purposes of paragraph (1) the permitted number in relation to each boat is:—

- (a) in the case of lobster, one; and
- (b) in the case of crabs, five.

Prohibition of use of pots

4.—(1) A person shall not use more than five pots.

(2) A person shall not take on board a boat pots on behalf of one or more other persons or boats.

Prohibition of use of stock cage

5. A person shall not use a stock cage.

Marking of pots

6. Marker buoys, or similar objects floating on the surface and intended to indicate the location of pots, shall be legibly and indelibly marked with either the name of the boat or the name of the owner of the boat from which the pots are set.

Exemptions

7. The prohibitions in regulations in 3, 4, 5 and the requirement in regulation 6 shall not apply to:—

- (a) a boat fishing outside Northern Ireland inshore waters;
- (b) a licensed fishing vessel;
- (c) a person operating under the authority and in accordance with a permit granted under Section 14 of the Act.

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Sealed with the Official Seal of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on 24th April 2008



Liam McKibben
A senior officer of the Department of Agriculture
and Rural Development

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This note is not part of the Regulations)

These regulations prohibit unlicensed fishing for certain species of crabs and lobster above specified limits, prohibit the use of stock pots, boxes, cages or other containment device by unlicensed fishermen and require marker buoys or similar flotation devices used to mark the site of the fishing gear to be marked.

The regulations 3, 4, 5 and 6 do not apply to vessels fishing outside Northern Ireland inshore waters, to any licensed fishing vessels or to persons granted a permit under Section 14 of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966.

A person who commits an offence under section 124 of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale (£5,000).

Glenarm Regeneration Plan Sub-Committee Meeting

Wilson Room, Larne Town Hall, Larne

11.09.25 – 14:10 to 15:20

Attendees: Cllr L Gray (Chair), Ald Ms G Mulvenna, Ald Mrs M Morrow, Cllr R Lawrence, M Hyndman (MH), L Morrow (LM), F Wilson (FW), J McVeigh (JMcV), A McMullan (AMcM), and K Hamilton (KH).

Apologies: Cllr G McKeen, A Moran, S Kirby, D Wall, L Cowan, E McMullan, K Steele and V Watts.

Notes: W Paul

No.	Action	
1	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES	
	<p>The Chair (Cllr L Gray) issued a warm welcome to Ald Ms G Mulvenna to the Meeting, following her absence due to illness. Ald Mulvenna thanked Members for their good wishes on her recovery and was delighted to be back today, her first Council Meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from A Moran, S Kirby, D Wall, L Cowan, E McMullan, K Steele and V Watts.</p>	
2	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
	None.	
3	TERMS OF REFERENCE – NOMINATE CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR	
	NTA.	
4	MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 MAY 2025	
	<p>The minutes were received as an accurate record.</p> <p>Proposer – Mrs F Wilson</p> <p>Seconder – Mr L Morrow.</p>	

Glenarm Regeneration Plan Sub-Committee Meeting

No.	Action	
5	KEY MATTERS ARISING	
5.1	<p>Update on Quarry</p> <p>AMcM updated Members on recent discussions held with DfI Roads and Planners. He advised that Council now had a viable option whereby a major road realignment could be avoided if the front part of the Mill building were to be demolished (except for the chimney which would be kept for historic interest and part of the development), and the existing wall moved back. This would result in better visibility, wider access to the Dickeystown Road and ease of traffic movement at its junction with the Coast Road. This proposal is currently with the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Officers are awaiting strategic direction. Members thanked AMcM and his team for their valuable input and expertise in bringing about this potential solution and the creation of such a versatile area.</p> <p>JMcV informed Members of an outstanding legal issue with the Antrim Estate which was currently being actioned.</p>	JMcV
5.2	Eglinton Barn – Issues Remaining	
5.2.1	<p>Water Connection to Eglinton Barn</p> <p>AMcM informed Members that the water connection was now in place. Looking at future upgrades, Members enquired as to the possibility of a sink and a water heater to be installed in the Barn, and if possible, their installation before the end of October, prior to planned Halloween festivities. These would include Spooky Story telling on Friday 31 October 2025 and a Halloween Event from 4.30pm on Saturday 1 November 2025, concluding with a Firework display. It was also noted that the Community Association had not been successful in gaining grant funding towards the Halloween Event, which had been planned by volunteers. Members also noted that a Christmas Céilí had been planned for Saturday 6 December, 2025. Mrs Hyndman asked for the roof to be checked for leaks, which were not condensation related.</p> <p>Action Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMcM to pass these requests onto Facilities for consideration. 	AMcM
5.2.2	<p>Glenarm Heritage Steam Boiler Project</p> <p>Members noted that the boiler was to be placed outside in the Yard, to the left of the door; and that EMcM was in discussions with the Preservation Trust regarding a possible canopy for its protection.</p>	EMcM
5.3	<p>Update on Eglinton Yard/Barn and Harbour Regeneration Designs</p> <p>AMcM outlined that his team were revisiting the design for the area based on scope and current requirements, and a consultation document would be compiled for Members' consideration prior to a planning application being submitted. Discussion ensued around the possibility of additional car parking and portable toilets being added to the scheme.</p>	AMcM

Glenarm Regeneration Plan Sub-Committee Meeting

No.	Action	
	<p>Mr L Morrow referred to the recent success of the All-Ireland Coastal Rowing Championship and Members noted that the organisers were keen to revisit Glenarm again to host the event in a few years' time.</p> <p>Action Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JMcV to liaise with L Cowan re possible external funding through Shared Island funding bid. 	JMcV
5.4	<p>Signage</p> <p>Members noted that the signs would be installed initially in Gracehill, followed by Carnlough, then Whitehead.</p> <p>Action Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JMcV to recirculate images at the next Sub Committee Meeting. JMcV to advise S Bailie that when the existing sign in Glenarm is removed, it is to be delivered to the Barn and erected inside the Yard as part of its history. 	JMcV JMcV
5.5	<p>Streetscape</p> <p>JMcV advised that this was currently being reviewed and spoke of funding issues – update to be presented at a future Meeting.</p>	JMcV
6	UPDATE ON FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	
6.1	<p>Update on Shared Island Fund Activities</p> <p>Members noted that all funding opportunities were being actively pursued.</p>	
6.2	<p>Capital Plan FY 2025/26 Update</p> <p>JMcV updated Members on the Capital Plan element for Glenarm, adding that there was the potential for several upgrades in the Village.</p>	
6.3	<p>PeacePlus 2.4 Application</p> <p>KH reported that he had met onsite with AMcM and Paul Kerrigan (Planning) this morning, to consider possible locations for a modular unit to be placed which would be used as a Community Hub. Members noted that 5//6 similar Hubs had already been established and Council had planned to have at least 10 within the Borough. These would offer local ICT facilities as well as high quality space available for hire.</p>	KH

Glenarm Regeneration Plan Sub-Committee Meeting

No.	Action	
7	ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
	<p>Members raised the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Installation of lights at Eglinton Barn, 2 no. exterior and 2 no. interior to illuminate the Yard. • Second request for the provision of a small portable stage and microphone/speaker for musicians/singers be made available asap at the Barn. • The 3 summer seats which had previously been removed had yet to be installed along the Bar mouth area. Mrs F Wilson to organise addition of plaques to seats. • 3 dangerously deteriorating 'Britain in Bloom' summer seats and posts, located along the slipway side of the Rowing Club to be removed and replaced with new plastic seats, possibly one of which could be supplied through PSP as a 'Chatty bench'. <p>Action points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JMcV advised that he would refer the above issue to Parks/Operations for attention/action. 	JMcV
8	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	<p>Possibly, Thursday 29 January 2026 in the Mayor's Parlour / Wilson Room at Larne Town Hall. Time to be confirmed. It was agreed that, subject to availability, the Mayor be invited along to this Meeting and seasonal refreshments be made available.</p>	JMcV

Council/Committee:	Environment & Economy
Date:	08 December 2025
Report Title:	Town Centre Revitalisation Programme Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Eamon McMullan, Capital Regeneration Manager
Approver:	John McVeigh, Acting Director of Community

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with an update on the Department for Communities (DfC) funded Revitalising Town Centres Programme.

2. Background

- 2.1. DfC introduced a programme to fund activities to help revitalise Town Centres across NI covering the since 2023.
- 2.2. The programme funds activities and projects designed to enhance the appeal and enjoyment of Town Centres, encouraging increased footfall and economic growth.
- 2.3. In its first year £251,000 of funding was awarded to 78 businesses across the 3 towns. In the second year, 2024/25 a total of £224,000 was awarded.
- 2.4. Elected Members have been briefed at regular intervals on progress at meetings held in January 2025, April 2025 and most recently at the September 2025 Environment and Economy Committee meeting. Elected members participating in the Revitalise Steering Group have regularly reviewed progress during these monthly meetings.
- 2.5. The Town Centre Revitalisation Programme has a funding allocation of £670,000 (including Council match funding) across FY 2025/26 and FY 2026/27.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1. Five project themes are being funded under the scheme during FY25/26 and FY26/27. These are as follows:

- Shopfront Grant Scheme (launched October 2025)
- Carrickfergus Heritage Shopfront Renewal Scheme
- Pavement Café Furniture
- Carrickfergus Twinkle Trail (December 2025)
- Animation Activities (September 2025)

A. Shop Front Grant Scheme, Phase III

3.2. Following the success of the first and second phase of the Shop Front Grant Scheme, an application to DfC was approved in June to deliver a third phase.

3.3. The maximum grant award available was increased to £7,500 (previously £5,000) and requires 80% match funding in line with the previous two schemes.

3.4. The project objectives are:

- Improve the street facing property façade
- Impact positively on the overall streetscape
- Bring further investment into town centres

3.5. As with the previous scheme, applicants can avail of a dedicated architect team to offer support for securing planning approval for their shop front enhancements.

- 3.6. Information Sessions were held in each town for applicants to learn more about the scheme. These sessions were held on:
 - Monday 6 October 2025 – Carrickfergus Town Hall
 - Tuesday 7 October 2025 – Larne Town Hall
 - Wednesday 8 October 2025 – The Braid, Ballymena
 - Monday 13 October 2025 – Online Session
- 3.7. The scheme was opened for applications on the Council's grant portal on 13 October 2025 and closed on 1 December 2025 at noon.
- 3.8. Upon the closing deadline 95 applications were received with the following breakdown by location:
 - Ballymena – 57 applications
 - Carrickfergus – 12 applications
 - Larne – 25 applications
 - Greenisland – 1 application
- 3.9. The total grant amount applied for is £480,362 with total project costs of approximately £767,647. However, it is important to note that these figures are estimates and will change based on ineligible applications and some grant amounts changing due to planning permissions etc.
- 3.10. As per previous schemes grant assessments will be carried out on a weekly basis by Council Staff. Each application is assessed against an agreed set of eligibility and scoring criteria as set out in the programme guidance. To be recommended for funding, each application must be eligible, and achieve a minimum score of 60% (12/20)
- 3.11. Each applicant that is awarded a grant will have 6 months from the date of issue of their Letter of Offer to complete their project.
- 3.12. All projects are scored by a panel of Council Officers, consisting of representatives of the Council grants team, Town Centre Development, and Capital Regeneration teams. Capital Works input is also sought where required as part of a value for money check. A single common score is agreed for each application.

B. Carrickfergus Heritage Shopfront Renewal Scheme

- 3.13. This enhanced shopfront improvement plan aims to offer increased grants of up to £30,000 for properties located on target streets within the Carrickfergus conservation area.
- 3.14. This area is subject to Conservation Area Design Guidelines which requires where possible, preserve and restore traditional features such as original fascias, corbels, pilasters, tiled entranceways, and stall risers. These shopfronts must be replaced with timber rather than uPVC materials. The aim is to reinstate traditional shopfronts using appropriate materials and methods.
- 3.15. The Capital Regeneration team will commission an architectural condition survey report, design and specification for the designated area to help assess the scope of the project.
- 3.16. This scheme aims to launch in Spring of 2026.

C. Pavement Cafe Furniture

- 3.17. Due to the success of previous schemes £25,000 will be allocated for the supply of outdoor street furniture to town centre hospitality businesses. Requests have been received by the Town Centre Development team for additional pieces of Tables, Chairs, Branded Parasols, Movable Hedges and Café Barriers.

D. Carrickfergus Twinkle Trail

- 3.18. The Twinkle Trail is one of the Enhanced Seasonal Lighting Projects which is 90% funded by DfC and 10% MEABC.
- 3.19. Designed with young families in mind, the Twinkle Trail will transform the park into a gentle, glowing Christmas walk, giving children and adults a chance to explore a series of illuminated features and experience something a little different in the run up to Christmas.
- 3.20. Local primary school children have been given the opportunity to be the first to experience the Twinkle Trail at an exclusive event on Saturday 6 December 2025, via a ticket link distributed by their school. However, for anyone unable to get tickets, the trail can be visited from Sunday 7 December 2025 onwards, from 4pm to 8pm free of charge, with no ticket required.

- 3.21. Shaftesbury Park will be closed from Wednesday 3 December 2025 to Saturday 6 December 2025 for the set up and installation and reopen on Sunday 7 December 2025 at 8am.
- 3.22. Access to the park will be monitored by staff and CCTV, to safeguard the equipment and dogs will need to be kept on a lead until the event ends on Thursday 11 December 2025 at 8pm.

E. Animation Activities

- 3.23. This programme includes an animation element to complement other projects recently funded by DfC. The programme supported the partnership event at the St Patrick's regeneration site marking the completion of the first projects in this area. The St Patricks Regeneration Link the Town Community Event and Fun Run took place on 13 September 2025. This event was organised by Ballymena Runners Club.

F. Dunluce Street Environmental Enhancement Scheme

- 3.24. This project aims to cosmetically improve Dunluce Street in Larne in advance of any future public realm schemes. The scheme will include:
 - Cleaning of property facades and gable walls
 - Treatment of down pipes/guttering
 - Painting of property facades and gable walls
 - Replacement hoarding at derelict gap site
- 3.25. Two separate procurement exercises anticipated going out for tender in December 2025 which will include painting contract and replacement hoarding with impetrative panel and/or artwork.

G. Street Art Project

- 3.26. The Larne Street Art event took place on the 30 August 2025, with positive feedback from residents. A Ballymena mural site has been secured on Church Street, and an artist will be procured via quotation by the end of December 2025. The Carrickfergus underpass project will take place during half term in February 2026 and will incorporate public engagement to develop ideas for the designs that will tie in with the wider City Deal project aims.



H. Larne Pop Up Park

- 3.27. A Landscape Architect led ICT team has been procured to design a temporary pop-up park on the gap site, extending from 15 Main Street to 28 Point Street, Larne.
- 3.28. A stakeholder engagement session was held on 15 October 2025 in Larne Town Hall and further engagement has taken place with Larne Renovation Generation and Jubilee Farm. The feedback is currently being used to develop concept designs for the park.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan – Council is committed to the economic regeneration of the Towns and Villages in the Borough.
- 4.2. All of the projects outlined above contribute to the delivery of the Town Centre Investment Plans for Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. Officers from the Regeneration and Town Centre Teams will continue delivering the projects listed above in line with the Letters of Offer from DfC.
- 5.2. The team will remain focused on project delivery, working on closing reports, evaluations, and associated documentation, while also actively scoping out new regeneration projects to support future town centre development.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1 Elected Members are asked to
 - (i) Note the progress on projects delivered and ongoing projects in FY25/26.



Council/Committee:	Environment and Economy Committee
Date:	08 December 2025
Report Title:	PEACEPLUS General Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development
Approver:	Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the Mid & East Antrim PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1. The PEACEPLUS allocation for Mid & East Antrim is €5,848,008 under the PEACEPLUS Measure 1.1 for Co-Designed Local Community Peace Action Plans for the period up to 2028.
- 2.2. The Environment and Economy Committee at their meeting on 28 May 2024 approved the PEACEPLUS Action Plan. The Action Plan and Application were submitted to Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) on 6 June 2024.
- 2.3. The PEACEPLUS Partnership continues to meet. The last PEACEPLUS Partnership Board Meeting took place on 24 September at Carrickfergus Town Hall to provide Members with a progress update
- 2.4. The official launch of the PEACEPLUS Programme will take place during March 2026 and Members will be advised of the confirmed date in due course.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The PEACEPLUS Partnership Board received the attached presentation at Appendix 1 on the agreed programmes that will be delivered under Investment Area 1.1 as approved by SEUPB.
- 3.2. The priority over the last two months was on securing the staffing complement to deliver the Action Plan. The Investment and Funding Manager position remains vacant, interviews are ongoing and it is hopeful that the position will be filled in early 2026.

- 3.3. The Project Officer position also remains vacant and it is hoped that this position will be filled in early 2026. Existing staff complement is 1.5 staff (P/T Finance Manager, P/T Admin and Monitoring Support Officer and P/T Project Officer) with the full staffing complement required to fully develop, manage and implement the PEACEPLUS Projects and Programmes.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1 Financial Implications: The budget of €5,848,008 is available to support the development and delivery of Peace & Reconciliation projects across Mid & East Antrim with 100% available for projects as detailed in the action plan.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 Upon appointment of the Investment and Funding Manager and related staff the PEACEPLUS Programme will gather momentum to ensure successful implementation across Mid and East Antrim.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1 Elected Members are asked to note the PEACEPLUS update with the focus on ensuring the staffing complement is in place to manage and deliver the programme.

7. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 – Mid and East Antrim Borough Council PEACEPLUS Co-Designed Local Action Plan Programme Summary



Mid & East Antrim Borough Council PEACEPLUS Co-Designed Local Action Plan Programme Summary

This project will be funded by the European Union's PEACEPLUS Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body

PEACEPLUS PROGRAMME

Investment Area 1.1

Investment Area 1.1:

To enable and empower local community partnerships, led by the local authorities, to select and deliver priority projects on a cross community basis, which will result in shared and inclusive local services, facilities and spaces; and make a significant and lasting contribution to peace and reconciliation

**The plans will be centred
around *three core themes*:**

1

Local community
regeneration and
transformation

2

Thriving and
peaceful
communities

3

Building respect
for all cultural
identities

THEME 1: LOCAL COMMUNITY REGENERATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Activity / Programme	Summary	Participant Nos
Community Social Enterprise Hubs Programme (Capital Costs Element)	<p>This programme aims to develop and establish 3 x community/social enterprise activity hubs, one in each of the main towns within the Borough.</p> <p>These shared spaces will be created by refurbishing vacant buildings or enhancing existing community facilities in each of the main town centres.</p> <p>The hubs will serve as multi-purpose spaces, where a range of community-led and driven activities, training programmes and social enterprises can then operate from.</p>	600
Community/Sports Facilities Major Capital Works Programme	<p>This programme aims to support the capital development costs of 3 new or improved strategically significant shared spaces and facilities across the Council area.</p> <p>These shared spaces will enable increased physical activity, health and wellbeing opportunities, as well as to facilitate meaningful cross-community interaction.</p>	600

THEME 1: LOCAL COMMUNITY REGENERATION AND TRANSFORMATION CONTINUED

34

Activity / Programme	Summary	Participant Nos
Community/Sports Facilities Capital Enhancement Programme	<p>This programme aims to revitalise communities from across the MEABC area, by bringing up to 10 underused facilities into community use and/or refurbishing existing community/sports facilities.</p> <p>Capital improvements per project are to include measures to e.g. improve energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, health and safety, modernisation, or access.</p> <p>Supported projects will then involve additional people from a variety of backgrounds in their programming and activities as a result.</p>	500
Technical Support Costs	Professional services to cover technical management support of major capital works & capital enhancement programmes.	
		1700

THEME 2: THRIVING AND PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES

Activity / Programme	Summary	Participant Nos
Community Social Enterprise Hubs Programme (Programme Support Element)	Support costs for 3 x Partners to facilitate programme delivery, activity and project animation.	Under Theme 1
Strengthening Communities Programme	<p>This programme aims to develop area-based programmes and activities in each of the legacy Council areas for shared learning, cooperation, and celebration between the local community and voluntary organisations across the Mid and East Antrim Borough area.</p> <p>Each plan will be community-led and tailored to the specific skills and needs of the local area.</p>	800
Events and Festivals Programme (sub-part of Strengthening Communities)	Delivery of 12 x community led festivals with each area providing 2 x events /festivals. Facilitated volunteer training also to be provided.	60
Social Enterprise Development Programme (sub-part of Strengthening Communities)	Delivery 3 x social enterprise support programme, bespoke to the needs of the community/voluntary sector groups in each area.	60

THEME 2: THRIVING AND PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

36

Activity / Programme	Summary	Participant Nos
Plot to Plate Programme	This programme is a health and wellbeing programme that will encourage outdoor activities, improve nutrition knowledge, and promote sustainability and horticulture's wider mental health benefits.	230
Women's Programme	<p>The aim of this programme is to bring women from a variety of areas and backgrounds from across the Borough together to share experiences and build confidence and skills.</p> <p>It will combine a series of learning and development events or programmes at both a local level and Borough wide.</p>	210
Youth Programme	This programme will fully engage with young people to co-design and implement a comprehensive programme to build cultural awareness, promote inclusion & empathy, and provide intercultural activities across the Borough.	220
		1580

THEME 3: BUILDING RESPECT FOR ALL CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Activity / Programme	Summary	Participant Nos
Who Do We Think We Are? Programme	<p>This programme will engage people of all ages and backgrounds in an exploration of the history of their local community and to explore what 'community' means to them.</p> <p>It will include a celebration of local history and legends through arts and creative activity, also the chance to capture local stories.</p> <p>There will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x primary school programme (2 schools per DEA with 30 pupils from each school) 420 participants overall • 1x post primary school programme (100 participants) • 21 community projects • 2 x programmes of showcase events/exhibitions 	898

THEME 3: BUILDING RESPECT FOR ALL CULTURAL IDENTITIES CONTINUED

Activity / Programme	Summary	Participant Nos
Veteran's Programme	<p>This programme is designed to increase social inclusion among individuals and families from the services background.</p> <p>This will be achieved by facilitating several events which will enable increased social inclusion. In addition to this a number of veterans will be supported with counselling.</p>	270
Sports Cluster Programme	<p>This programme will facilitate sports clubs and physical activity groups from across different communities throughout the Borough to come together and develop multi-sport programmes.</p>	420
It's Our MEA Too - Conscious Inclusion Programme	<p>The Programme will include working with individuals, groups, and organisations to identify what adjustments they could make to ensure that workshops/events are more inclusive to all.</p> <p>It will include the delivery of a number of awareness events on areas such as autism, visual impairment, emotional health etc.</p>	500

THEME 3: BUILDING RESPECT FOR ALL CULTURAL IDENTITIES CONTINUED

Activity / Programme	Summary	Participant Nos
It's Our MEA Too - Inclusion Of All Backgrounds Programme	<p>This programme aims to build, improve, and sustain relationships between minority communities (including newcomers, refugees, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, and neurodiverse individuals) and the wider resident community in the MEABC area.</p> <p>The Programme aims to address issues of trust, prejudice, and intolerance while increasing levels of understanding, integration, and civic participation among these groups.</p>	480
		2568

Council/Committee: Environment & Economy Committee

Date: 08 December 2025

Report Title: Economic Development Activity Report

Publication Status: Open

Author: Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development

Approver: Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on current Economic Development activity.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Economic Development Function includes five key strategic areas including:
- Skills and Entrepreneurship
 - Business Growth
 - Investment and Funding
 - Investment and Place
 - Town Centre Development

3. Key Issues for Consideration

The following update is to provide Members with an overview across the five key operational areas within the Economic Development Team

NAME OF ACTIVITY:	UPDATE:
Investment and Funding	
PEACEPLUS Programme	A PEACEPLUS update report is tabled at this Committee.
Rural Development Programme Update	A Rural Development update report is tabled at this Committee.
Skills and Entrepreneurship	
Get Started in Business & Enterprise Pathways	Get Started in Business provides support for economically inactive residents who are interested in self-employment. 8 economically inactive participants (target 7) are engaged on Get Started in Business and are currently receiving intensive business start mentoring and will have access to a Get Started fund to test their business ideas.

	Enterprise Pathways supports unemployed people to identify, explore and test business ideas, develop enterprise and personal skills, build networks, test trade, start and grow a business and access post-start support as appropriate. The programme includes mentoring and access to a Get Started fund. 9 unemployed participants have enrolled on Enterprise Pathways. 12 participants had been recruited (target 16 before 31 March 2026), however 2 have disengaged for personal reasons and 1 has now left the programme having secured employment. This programme is open for additional participants.
Numeracy Bootcamps	The bootcamps aim to support adults to become confident in numeracy and mathematical literacy through a series of interactive practical workshops. The first of these workshops, Festive Baking and Jewellery Making – will be held in Oakfield Community Centre Carrickfergus on 17 and 19 December.
Placement Insights Programme Castle Tower	A six-week project working alongside participants in Castle tower, exploring bitesize practical activities, education and employability support through engagement with local employers. This programme aims to introduce the world of work to our young people and help them develop pragmatic, transferrable skills. This programme is due to commence in January/February 2026. School engagement is ongoing.
Do It Herself	Two cohorts of the Council-funded DIY programme commenced on 1 October 2025 in Carnlough and Carrickfergus with a total of 23 participants. The 12-week programme will complete on 17 December 2025 with each participant completing a Level 1 Numeracy and Level 2 Vocational Skills qualification.
Sewing and Design	This Council-funded programme has been procured and awarded to Strombolitwo. Two cohorts of participants, 16 in total, will complete a 6-week course commencing January 2026, to develop practical skills and theoretical knowledge in creative industries through a range of hands-on activities/assignments and inspire sessions in fashion and costume design from industry experts incorporating a numeracy element.
Investment and Place	
Making The Future (MTF)	MTF Chair David Watson and officers continue to conduct company visits with MTF members across the borough to help understand and support their business needs. A recently launched MTF Network website will showcase the borough as an engine for advanced manufacturing and an MTF email newsletter containing latest news and relevant opportunities in funding and programming was issued in early December.

	<p>The Gallaher Trust have agreed to fund a fifth cohort of the Manufacturing Academy in conjunction with Northern Regional College and MTF companies. To date, the course, which is targeted at economically inactive individuals in the Ballymena area, has had 43 participants complete it across four cohorts, with 21 of those individuals remaining in full-time employment. An information event for the fifth cohort is planned for Friday 9 January with the course scheduled to start mid-January.</p>
i4C Innovation and CleanTech Project	<p>The i4C Innovation and CleanTech Centre, along with the iLab concept, was showcased at a "How to Drive Business Growth with Innovation" event on Wednesday, 19 November, at Northern Regional College. The event brought together 32 participants representing 16 companies, including MTF members, SMEs, large companies, and startups from across the Borough. This meeting served as a significant opportunity to involve industry stakeholders in the project's research phase and to capture valuable insights that will help shape the future proposition.</p>
HyTech NI	<p>The Outline Business Case for the £20m Hytech NI project was submitted to Invest NI in March 2025. Discussions continue around potential grant funding rates awarded to industry partners to co-fund the mobility and blending demonstrator elements of the project based on State Aid rules. Discussions are also ongoing with funders to agree the letter of offer format and structure with casework approval meeting planned for late 2025 which could see letters of offer issued and the project commencing by Spring 2026.</p>
International Relations	<p>The Deputy Mayor and an Officer attended the inaugural China-Northern Ireland Economic, Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum, hosted by The Consul General of the People's Republic of China in November. The forum brought together stakeholders from advanced manufacturing, life & health sciences, green energy, ports & logistics, etc., with keynote remarks and sector roundtables focused on practical collaboration.</p>
ECOS Hub	<p>Rental income remains steady against target and a new Ecos Hub website has been launched with the aim of driving additional enquiries and increased visibility of the Centre's facilities and services – www.ecoshub.co.uk. The website launch was supported with a bespoke ezine sent by NI Chamber to their database of over 10,000 accounts and by a digital marketing campaign with Business Eye. The aim of the campaign is to drive awareness of the facility to new potential customers across Northern Ireland to help generate income.</p>

Business Growth	
Go Succeed Grow & Scale	<p>A total of 110 businesses are currently receiving or have completed mentoring on Grow and Scale.</p> <p>Mentoring is underway on the Green to Grow, Digital Edge and NIHE opportunities programmes.</p> <p>A full update will be provided in the next Go Succeed quarterly report.</p>
Go Succeed Grants	<p>Call 2 closed on 5 November 2025. A total of 42 applications were received, which are currently being assessed. A full update will be provided in the next Go Succeed quarterly report.</p>
Augmenting Business' Growth potential via Stakeholder Supports	<p>Council's Business Client Managers continue to work with local and regional Economic Development Partners and Stakeholders to make referrals to relevant supports on behalf of our local businesses. Officers will continue to further develop relationships and gain an understanding of new and emerging initiatives as well as identifying and meeting new stakeholders as we look to ensure our local business base is accessing as much relevant support as possible.</p>
Invest NI Partnership Working <i>Update on Council's local level partnership work to increase the pipeline of businesses capable of access Invest NI financial assistance.</i>	<p>Regional Business Advice Clinics: Invest NI worked with Council and other stakeholders to deliver a series of Advice Clinics for local businesses. Attendees at these clinics had the chance to find out about a range of support to include Council, FE Colleges, and economic development agencies. The clinics took place as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 October 10-1pm Ballymena Business Centre • 5 November 10-1pm Carrickfergus Enterprise • 27 November 10-1pm Willowbank Business Park, Larne <p>All follow up work where relevant is underway with attendees via Business Client Managers.</p> <p>The Invest NI Business Innovation Grant (BIG) is now open for applications. It will close at 12 noon on Wednesday 10 December 2025. Business Client Managers have notified clients, and the opportunity is shared via the Ezine.</p> <p>The level of grant support offered through BIG is from a minimum of £5,000 up to a maximum of £20,000. This programme offers a grant support rate of 70% of total eligible project costs.</p> <p>Full details including eligibility checker & application are available at Business Innovation Grant Innovate NI</p>

Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF)	<p>Call 5 assessment stage is complete 10 applicants from Mid and East Antrim were successful pending acceptance of Letters of Offer.</p> <p>Call 6 Expressions of Interest (EOI) closed on 24 October 2025. 29 EOIs were received from Mid and East Antrim businesses. Of those received 21 were deemed eligible and invited to make a full application. Closing date for completed applications was 5pm on December 5th.</p>
Town Centre Development	
Footfall	<p>Footfall comparisons (October 2025 monthly report)</p> <p>The total number of visitors for the year to date in Larne is slightly down (-0.1%) on the previous year.</p> <p>The total number of visitors for the year to date in Ballymena is down on the previous year by (-3%)</p> <p>The total number of visitors for the year to date in Carrickfergus is slightly down on the previous year (-0.1%)</p>
Carrickfergus Artisan Market	<p>The November Artisan Market took place on Saturday 1 November in Carrickfergus Town Hall, the market has now moved indoors during the Autumn/winter months. There was a full market of 14 traders who attended the market. Footfall was steady throughout the day, with traders reporting high sales. The December market was held a week earlier to coincide with the Christmas Lights Switch On and took place on Saturday 22 November. The next market will take place on Saturday 7 February in Carrickfergus Town Hall.</p>
Business Support	<p>Ongoing business engagement via the Town Centre Newsletter, this e-zine is disseminated to the Town Centre businesses at the beginning of each month. Each newsletter is bespoke to each Town Centre and includes upcoming events, updates and opportunities from stakeholders and Council Departments.</p> <p>A training plan for January/February is currently being worked up to offer to Town Centre Businesses. An expression of interest will be sent to the Town Database for businesses to register themselves for the training.</p> <p>Daily support is provided for Town Centre issues with staff acting as points of contact for businesses across all three towns.</p>
Town Centre Activity	<p>A full programme of Festive activity is now ongoing in the 3 Town Centres and will take place throughout November/December.</p> <p>Christmas Artisan Market</p>

	<p>The market in Carrickfergus took place as part of the Switch on Activity on Saturday 22 November from 1-5.30pm. The market took place in High Street Car Park in a marquee; there were 15 traders in attendance selling a range of handmade items. In addition, there was a Children's Playbus alongside the Market. This was the third year of running the market. It was very well received by the public with high footfall reported throughout the day.</p> <p>Ballymena Christmas Craft Village</p> <p>The Ballymena Craft Village runs from Wednesday 3 – Monday 8 December. Wellington Court will be decorated with 7 wooden huts, filled with 35 artisan traders over the 5 days, offering unique gifts, crafts and seasonal treats. The huts are open from 11am – 4pm each day (excluding Sunday). On Saturday 6 December there is Face painting funded by Ballymena BID and festive walkabout Performers.</p> <p>Larne Christmas Craft & Community Village</p> <p>The Larne Craft Village runs from Wednesday 10 – Monday 15 December. Broadway in Larne will be decorated with 9 wooden huts, filled with 45 artisan traders, local community groups and schools over the 5 days selling handmade seasonal gifts. The huts will be open from 11am – 4pm each day (excluding Sunday) and on Saturday 13 December, there are walkabout performers in Broadway.</p>
Shop Front Improvement Grants	<p>The Shopfront Revitalisation Scheme Phase 3 has now launched. The scheme will offer grants ranging from £500 to £7,500 to eligible businesses located within the Town Centre Boundary of Carrickfergus, Larne, Ballymena and Greenisland who want to improve the overall appearance of their Shop front. The Grant can cover 80% of the cost of eligible items or works up to a maximum of £7,500 per business.</p> <p>The scheme opened on Monday 13 October 2025 and will close on Monday 1 December at 12 noon.</p>
Revamp Refresh grant	<p>The new grant scheme will offer up to £1000 in grant support to town centre businesses for internal shop improvements such as merchandising equipment, lighting, shelving, branding. The scheme will open to businesses on Monday 5 January and close on Monday 26 January.</p>
Pavement Cafe Support	<p>11 hospitality businesses have availed of outdoor furniture including, tables, chairs and hedging.</p>
Revitalise Steering Group	<p>Officers from the Town Centre and the Regeneration team continue to support the Revitalise Steering Group to develop and roll out regeneration projects and initiatives for each of the Town Centres as prioritised in the Investment Plans and Town</p>

	Centre strategies. Live projects currently being worked through include; cosmetic improvements to Dunluce Street, Larne pop-up park, CCTV provision, festive trail and new public realm schemes.
Encouraging Footfall	Cross Departmental development work is ongoing to identify opportunities to encourage footfall and rejuvenate the Town Centres.
Sound System for Carrickfergus & Ballymena	Officers have been working to install the new sound system in Ballymena and Carrickfergus, this has now been installed in both Town Centres.

4. General Considerations / Implications

No implications relating to this update report.

5. Proposed Way Forward

The report is presented for noting.

6. Recommendation or Decision

Elected Members are asked to note the updated Economic Development Activity report.

Council/Committee:	Environment and Economy Committee
Date:	8 December 2025
Report Title:	Consultation from DfE on a Sustainable, Regional Approach for the Production, Storage, Transport and Use of Hydrogen as a Fuel
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development
Approver:	Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on a proposed response by Council to the Department for the Economy's consultation on a sustainable, regional approach for the 'Production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen as a fuel', included at Appendix 1.

2. Background

- 2.1. In December 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive published its Energy Strategy, "The Path to Net Zero Energy", which set out a long-term vision of net zero and affordable energy and recognised the substantial opportunity for hydrogen to contribute to decarbonising energy. The Strategy included utilising increasing levels of renewable electricity for green hydrogen production to potentially provide the equivalent of 19–24% total energy demand in 2050.
- 2.2. However, since the publication of the Energy Strategy in 2021, the landscape of hydrogen's proposed application has changed. Technological advancements, research, and assessments of Northern Ireland's need to meet net zero have refined the potential uses of hydrogen. The need for a dedicated hydrogen policy framework, focusing on the production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen as a fuel, was recognised and the Department's preferred policy position has been set out in the consultation paper.
- 2.3. The online consultation was launched on 25 September 2025 and will close for responses on 18 December 2025. The consultation explores the barriers for the production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen and provides policy options for meeting these challenges. The consultation exercise will enable stakeholders to express opinions on the preferred policy positions as well as issues around the regulatory framework and development of the local hydrogen sector.

- 2.4. These responses from stakeholders will help to inform the final policy on hydrogen. This will in turn feed into the development of an action plan for the local hydrogen industry. Given Council's focus over the past few years on developing hydrogen initiatives to support economic growth it is important that we respond to this consultation.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

The consultation is open for a relatively short period of time, with officers from the Economic Development Team drafting the attached response at Appendix 2 and proposing to respond via the online consultation portal to a range of questions included in a questionnaire by the 18 December 2025 deadline.

- 3.1. The preferred policy positions set out in the consultation document include the Department's approach to:
- Hydrogen production
 - Hydrogen transport and storage
 - Uses of hydrogen
 - Hydrogen sector development
 - Regulatory framework
- 3.2. Preferred policy positions are indicated for each of the areas noted above and key questions under each heading posed by the Department for respondents to address or comment on.
- 3.3. The Council led Hydrogen Training Academy is referenced in the paper as evidence of a skills training initiative which has been successfully delivered to date, with the potential to expand the offering as part of the integration into the HyTech NI project also being noted. Council's role in delivering a range of hydrogen projects is also noted and details of the QUB/AMIC led Hydrogen Technology Accelerator and the three Hydrogen Demonstrators in Ballymena as part of the NI Complementary Funded HyTech NI project is highlighted as an integrated package which will help to develop a dynamic and competitive hydrogen economy in the region.
- 3.4. Council responses were largely supportive of the proposed approach with a summary of the main responses outlined below:
- 3.5. **Hydrogen Production:** On the proposed approach of continued support for the Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard and the benefits of utilising otherwise dispatched-down wind generation for hydrogen production, the proposed response notes that Council would be largely supportive of the economical and environmental benefits of each in order to create opportunities for green hydrogen production and utilisation in the region. Furthermore, our proposed response notes that we would be supportive of creating local funding streams to incentivise the sector. Council however is not in a

position to inform what a realistic low carbon hydrogen production target by 2035 in NI should be.

- 3.6. **Hydrogen Transport and Storage:** The policy consultation asks respondents to consider if Northern Ireland requires a dedicated hydrogen pipeline infrastructure. The proposed response notes that Council would not propose to develop a dedicated pipeline infrastructure initially due to the volume of hydrogen which we are likely to produce or use in the near future being relatively low and the current transport and storage solutions being flexible and adequate for the most common use cases.
- 3.7. **Uses of Hydrogen:** The consultation raises the question of what actions the Department might take to encourage development of e-fuels, with the proposed response from Council suggesting that flexible financial support, incentivising e-fuel usage and supporting e-fuels projects at all different stages are key enablers to hydrogen sector development. Furthermore, Council is proposing to support use of hydrogen in the power sector in both centralised (power stations) and decentralised (fuel-cells/engines) situations. Council is also supportive of exploring the use of hydrogen in the gas network, given our proposed HyTech NI Gas Blending Demonstrator project and the fact that it would be a strong demonstration of how NI could accommodate a hydrogen blend in the future via the Moyle Interconnector.
- 3.8. **Hydrogen Sector Development:** On the question of how policy can aid development of hydrogen related supply chains, the proposed response notes the numerous benefits of having an adequate and effective policy framework in place to provide long term certainty, deliver financial incentives, support both demand and supply side and encourage infrastructure development. Furthermore, the response notes the essential and significant role skills and training courses can have in developing the hydrogen sector and lobbies for further support to build on successful initiatives such as the Council-led Hydrogen Training Academy.
- 3.9. **Regulatory Framework:** The proposed response notes that the priority regulatory issues for the local hydrogen sector include lack of policy, requirement for a regulatory body, a clear set of support mechanisms, infrastructure development, planning, consenting and safety standard considerations, and addressing the public perception of hydrogen use, all of which need to be addressed and supported via the policy framework and any future action plans.
- 3.10. Council's proposed response consultation is positive and welcoming of the preferred policy positions. The policy is likely to have a significant impact on developing, accelerating and supporting the regional hydrogen economy and could help Council to develop existing hydrogen initiatives such as the Hydrogen Training Academy and the HyTech NI project, as well as

supporting our wider CleanTech ambitions for the region via the i4C Innovation and CleanTech Centre.

4 General Considerations / Implications

4.1. No implications relating to this update report.

5 Proposed Way Forward

5.1 Proposed that the draft consultation responses in Appendix 2 are approved and submitted on the DfE consultation portal by the 18 December 2025 deadline.

6 Recommendation or Decision

6.1. Elected Members are asked to approve Council's response to the Department for the Economy consultation on a sustainable, regional approach for the Production, Storage, Transport and Use of Hydrogen as a Fuel Consultation.

7 Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 Department for the Economy – Consultation on a Sustainable, Regional Approach for the Production, Storage, Transport and Use of Hydrogen as a Fuel

Appendix 2 Proposed Consultation Response Questionnaire by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council



**CONSULTATION ON A SUSTAINABLE,
REGIONAL APPROACH FOR**

THE PRODUCTION, STORAGE, TRANSPORT AND USE OF HYDROGEN AS A FUEL



SEPTEMBER 2025

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

Hydrogen has the potential to play an important part in the delivery of my economic vision. I believe that hydrogen can play a key enabling role in energy security on our path to net zero by 2050 and create a new economic opportunity with the creation of alternative fuels, new technologies and the development of skills that will be needed to serve this market both here and across the world.



As electrification of notable segments of our economy advance, such as in electric vehicles and the adoption of heat pumps, we need to increase the proportion of electricity generated from renewable sources of energy. In doing so we must manage the inherent variability and intermittency of wind and solar sources of energy across each day and across seasons. We must do this for security of supply reasons but also to make the best use of expensively deployed assets. Hydrogen created using our natural resources can enhance our energy security, help us achieve self-sufficiency in renewable energy and displace fossil fuels.

The production of hydrogen is a relatively nascent activity here and we must work urgently to enable a market in hydrogen and hydrogen derived fuels to grow to deliver my decarbonisation objectives, take advantage of the economic opportunities and ensure that hydrogen's potential can be realised in our energy system.

I am pleased to launch this consultation that seeks your views and analysis to help understand the barriers and potential solutions for the production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen. I look forward to your feedback and building on early learnings from our hydrogen sector.

DR CAOIMHE ARCHIBALD MLA
MINISTER FOR THE ECONOMY

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1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive published its Energy Strategy, "The Path to Net Zero Energy", which set out a long-term vision of net zero and affordable energy and recognised the substantial opportunity for hydrogen to contribute to decarbonising energy. The Strategy included utilising increasing levels of renewable electricity for green hydrogen production to potentially provide the equivalent of 19–24% total energy demand in 2050.

In June 2022, the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 was introduced setting a legislative target of at least a 100% reduction in net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 compared to baseline, along with interim targets including at least a 48% reduction in net emissions and that at least 80% of electricity consumption is from renewable sources by 2030. The Climate Change Committee's (CCC) "Advice Report: The Path to a Net Zero Northern Ireland"¹ in March 2023 advises of the importance of producing or importing low-carbon hydrogen in meeting the challenge of Net Zero by 2050.

However, since the publication of the Energy Strategy in 2021, the landscape of hydrogen's proposed application has changed. Technological advancements, research, and assessments of Northern Ireland's need to meet net zero have refined the potential uses of hydrogen. This changing landscape has recently culminated in the latest CCC report published in March 2025 advising of a small but important role in industry such as heat for the chemicals sector as well as the development of synthetic fuels for shipping, aviation and for the agricultural sector.²

¹ [Advice report: The path to a Net Zero Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee](#)

² [Northern Ireland's Fourth Carbon Budget - Climate Change Committee](#)

Hydrogen Policy Landscape

The policies of neighbouring administrations will also impact the local hydrogen sector. The 2021 UK Hydrogen Strategy³ set out a pathway for hydrogen across all sectors with various methods of production. This was updated by the British Energy Security Strategy (2022) to include hydrogen production of up to 10GW by 2030 of which at least half should be electrolytic. The UK Hydrogen Strategy is due to be refreshed in autumn 2025.

The 2020 Scottish government hydrogen policy⁴ has an initial ambition of generating 5GW of renewable and low-carbon hydrogen by 2030 and the Welsh government hydrogen policy published in 2025 *“supports the development of emerging hydrogen infrastructure & applications which will have a positive impact on delivery towards net-zero and just transitions for citizens and industry affected by climate change.”*⁵

The Republic of Ireland National Hydrogen Strategy⁶ was published in July 2023 and focused on the production of renewable “green” hydrogen, with a target of 2GW production capacity by 2030.

The 2020 EU Hydrogen Strategy⁷ initially set out a target of installing at least 6GW of renewable energy-powered electrolyzers by 2024, with production volumes of up to 1 million tonnes of clean hydrogen. It also aimed for 40GW of electrolyser capacity by 2030, with production volumes increasing to 10 million tonnes of renewable hydrogen. However, under the REPowerEU plan launched in response to the energy crisis and the need to accelerate energy independence, the EU doubled its 2030 target to 20 million tonnes/year of renewable hydrogen consumed by 2030.⁸

There has been early innovation in the local hydrogen sector, however challenges remain. The current cost of producing electrolytic hydrogen when using grid supplied electricity is high. This is due to how the prices of electricity supplied via the grid are built up and the substantial capital investment and lifecycle replacements required. There are also challenges around identifying the most appropriate vector and storage for hydrogen for fuelling applications.

This consultation will explore the barriers for the production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen and provide policy options for meeting these challenges. It will enable stakeholders to express opinions on the policy positions as well as issues around the regulatory framework and development of the local hydrogen sector.

3 [UK Hydrogen Strategy - gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-hydrogen-strategy)

4 [Scottish Government Hydrogen Policy Statement - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-hydrogen-policy-statement/pages/1-to-4.aspx)

5 [Hydrogen policy \(HTML\) - gov.wales](https://gov.wales/hydrogen-policy)

6 [Ireland National Hydrogen Strategy - gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/2023-07-ireland-national-hydrogen-strategy/)

7 [EU Hydrogen Strategy - eur-lex.europa.eu](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2020/125/oj)

8 [REPowerEU Plan - eur-lex.europa.eu](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/1713/oj)

2. HOW TO RESPOND

The Department would welcome your views and comments on this consultation for a Hydrogen Policy for Northern Ireland, including on the questions set out in this paper. This consultation will be hosted online and can be found at [NI Direct - Citizen Space](#). We would encourage responders to utilise Citizen Space as it allows the Department to collate results faster.

Alternatively, you can respond to this consultation via email to hydrogenconsultation@economy-ni.gov.uk or you can respond in writing to the DfE Gas Team address:

Consultation – Hydrogen Policy for Northern Ireland

DfE Gas Team

6th Floor, Adelaide House

Adelaide Street

Belfast, BT2 8FD

To respond via email or letter submit the response form provided no later than **5pm on 18th December 2025**. Enquiries can also be forwarded to the email address above.

When responding via email or in writing, please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation - and if so, please state the name of the organisation. Also, quote the following Consultation Reference: Consultation - Hydrogen Policy for Northern Ireland.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Access to Consultation Responses

Following closure of the consultation, responses will be analysed, and a summary departmental response drafted and published. Personal data, such as names and email addresses, will not be published as part of this process. In addition, we do not intend to list any organisations that have responded to the consultation in any published report. For more information about what we do with personal data please see [DfE's privacy notice](#).

Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679.

3. HYDROGEN PRODUCTION

Current context for Hydrogen Production

It is recognised that hydrogen is a nascent sector with the cost to produce low carbon hydrogen from renewable power currently more expensive than non-renewable sources or carbon intensive methods.⁹ The major cost factors are:

- Capital cost
- Operating costs, including the cost of electricity
- Transportation, storage and efficiency¹⁰
- Commercial availability of electrolyzers or other technologies to produce low carbon hydrogen.

The cost/kg of low carbon/green hydrogen produced by electrolysis will be significantly influenced by the cost of electricity from renewable sources of generation. When electrolyser machines are grid connected under the current regulated market structures in addition to the price paid for the electricity conveyed there will be tariffs for a range of use of system charges (for the network operator and asset owner) and policy and regulated market costs. Large capital contributions for a grid connection may also be necessary. This is with the intention of avoiding detriment to other system users on service quality and cost to them of system operation for a new connection.

In certain circumstances a “private wire” arrangement bypassing the grid completely may be the most economic configuration to link renewable power generation to electrolytic hydrogen production when grid costs are incurred. However, in this scenario the benefits of the electrolyser machines being able to provide value to the system operator presenting as dispatchable load to balance renewable generation would be lost.

Focus on Low Carbon Hydrogen

There are a range of ways to produce hydrogen using different technologies with some being more environmentally friendly than others.¹¹

The Executive’s Energy Strategy,¹² supported by the Matrix report,¹³ set the direction for hydrogen production, given the region’s favourable topography for developing wind energy resources to generate renewable electricity, that hydrogen production should be focused on low carbon, including green hydrogen. This compliments the focus on renewable hydrogen within the Republic of Ireland hydrogen strategy.

Our region does not have the large energy intensive industrial clusters that could produce hydrogen from other methods. The Department’s engagement with local industry supports the view that low carbon hydrogen is the most attractive in the spectrum of production due to its lower emissions and is complementary to our renewable energy resources.

⁹ [Global Hydrogen Review 2024 – International Energy Agency](#), p.59

¹⁰ [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications – economy-ni.gov.uk](#) p.18-32

¹¹ [Northern Ireland’s Future Hydrogen Capability and Demand – matrixnl.org](#), p.2

¹² [NI Energy Strategy – economy-ni.gov.uk](#), p. 33

¹³ [Northern Ireland’s Future Hydrogen Capability and Demand – matrixnl.org](#), p.11

Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard

The 'UK Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard' (LCHS) defines what constitutes 'low carbon hydrogen' at the point of production setting a maximum threshold for greenhouse gas emissions allowed in the production process for hydrogen to be considered 'low carbon hydrogen'. The intent of the LCHS is to ensure new low carbon hydrogen production makes a direct contribution to our GHG emissions reduction targets.

The LCHS, which is kept under review, is applicable across the UK, including Northern Ireland. Meeting the LCHS will allow hydrogen producers here to seek support from current and future government support schemes and policies that have adopted the LCHS and will be applied when assessing eligibility.

To ensure parity with the rest of the UK (and signatory partners on the international stage) on the standard of hydrogen being produced here it is the '**preferred policy position**' of the Department to continue to promote the Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard.¹⁴

Methods of Low Carbon Hydrogen Production

The Department will not be prescriptive in the production methods used to meet this standard.

The Department recognises that there are a range of low carbon production methods including but not limited to; biohydrogen reactors, utilising waste biomass through anaerobic digestion, and green hydrogen via electrolysis, powered by renewable electricity. This might be delivered through a dedicated private wire connection or through the grid, for example, with dispatched down wind.¹⁵

Funding

There are already several UK-wide funding schemes being delivered by the UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) regarding the production of hydrogen, for example, the Net Zero Hydrogen Fund,¹⁶ or Hydrogen Allocation Rounds,¹⁷ however there has been limited success for companies here. It is the Department's '**preferred policy position**' to focus on existing UK and island of Ireland wide funding streams as the means to support low carbon hydrogen production in Northern Ireland.

The Department is aware that, to date, local industry may not have attributes more commonly found in GB to attract UK government funding. Hence DfE is working with industry to ensure that the local position is considered in the design of future funding schemes. The aim is to increase the number of applications, and success rate, from local industry in UK-wide subsidy schemes.

¹⁴ [UK Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁵ [Avoiding Dispatched Down Wind with Green Hydrogen - economy-ni.gov.uk](#)

¹⁶ [Net Zero Hydrogen Fund - gov.uk](#)

¹⁷ [Hydrogen Allocation Rounds - gov.uk](#)

Targets

Due to the distinct local infrastructure and market conditions, the entities looking to develop the availability of hydrogen are at different stages of development compared to elsewhere in the UK, making it difficult to set a comparable target for hydrogen production. Any target needs to be evidence-based and realistic in terms of viable use cases, amounts, and timeframes but also inspire confidence. As the Department has started working with stakeholders to gather the evidence base, the decision has been taken not to include a target at this stage. To reflect the role of hydrogen in our future energy mix, the Department's '**preferred policy position**', is to produce a hydrogen target focused on energy security and would welcome respondents to suggest sources of evidence to assist with this.

Questions

1. Do you agree with the Department's support for the Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard?
2. Is it economically and/or environmentally beneficial to utilise otherwise dispatched-down wind generation for hydrogen production? – Explain your reasoning, highlighting any disincentives/perverse incentives not to and the circumstances in which you see temporal and geographic correlation as being important.
3. Are there grounds (economic, environmental, social equity) for reforming the grid related charges for connecting electrolyzers as controllable loads?
4. What are the minimum conditions (e.g. scale, off-take market, supply chain, etc.) that would need to pertain to make a "private wire" connection to renewable power generation for electrolytical production of hydrogen viable?
5. Do you agree with the Department's focus on UK and Ireland-wide funding streams to support the local industry?
6. What sources of evidence, for example where demand growth is to arise from, should be used to help establish an energy security target for hydrogen in the region?
7. What would be a realistic target for low carbon hydrogen production in NI by 2035?

4. HYDROGEN TRANSPORT & STORAGE

Transportation of Hydrogen

Hydrogen used as a fuel is currently mostly transported from generation site to point of use by road using tube trailers, for example, when being used locally to refuel hydrogen buses. Hydrogen can also be transported through dedicated hydrogen pipelines with examples already operating in Europe and America. The pipelines can help to reduce costs for transportation over longer distances.¹⁸

Some of the barriers to the transportation of hydrogen include:

- High transportation costs¹⁹
- Costs from health and safety regulations

As hydrogen is still a nascent sector, there is not sufficient hydrogen demand to make the significant investment in a dedicated pipeline economically viable at present. This issue is highlighted via a current proposal from the local gas industry to develop what would be the first dedicated hydrogen pipeline in the UK, connecting to strategic energy infrastructure to include power stations, ports and potential offshore wind developments. The commercial viability remains uncertain, particularly regarding hydrogen demand and scale of necessary investment.²⁰ Furthermore, it is likely that near term prospective hydrogen projects may use hydrogen on-site thereby reducing the need for transport and its associated costs.

However, in the longer term, the Department recognises that there may be a need for dedicated hydrogen infrastructure as hydrogen production develops and usage increases to meet local requirements. This will be especially relevant for power generation and large-scale storage as infrastructure will be needed to store and access hydrogen. The Department will continue to liaise with industry on the potential future need in this area.

The Department's '**preferred policy position**' is to be open to dedicated hydrogen infrastructure in the longer term, provided it is economically viable.

Storage

Low carbon hydrogen can be produced and then stored in various forms until needed, for example, via underground options such as salt caverns and aquifers for long-term storage or it can be compressed or liquified and stored in overground tanks, which is more suitable for short turnaround periods. There are already a range of local companies and research projects looking at potential storage solutions for hydrogen.²¹

18 [Global Hydrogen Review 2024 – International Energy Agency](#), p.114-122

19 [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications – economy-ni.gov.uk](#), p. 29

20 [Greater Belfast Hydrogen Hub – mutual-energy.com](#)

21 [Northern Ireland Hydrogen Roadmap and Technology Options Scoping Study – matrixni.org](#) p.37

As we transition to an energy system focused on renewables there is a significant opportunity for stored hydrogen to help during times of low solar generation and/or periods of low wind speeds. In these scenarios an alternative form of low carbon/renewable energy supply will be needed. Research has recognised that “hydrogen could support the energy sector by compensating for the intermittency of renewable sources and the inter-seasonal variation of energy demand”.²² The importance of energy security is also recognised as one of the three primary strategic reasons for developing the hydrogen sector in the Republic of Ireland National Hydrogen strategy.

One of the main barriers to long-term hydrogen storage is finding somewhere with the necessary capacity. The underground storage caverns proposed at Islandmagee have the potential to store and provide significant amounts of hydrogen.²³ This could help with security of supply and provide energy system flexibility.²⁴ These caverns are currently being developed by private ownership and there has been local opposition to their use for the storage of natural gas.

Gemserv, in research commissioned for the department, modelled the levelised costs of storing energy using Li-ion batteries and underground hydrogen salt caverns.

Their research indicates that, although it is difficult to compare the two energy storage methods directly, for short-term storage, i.e. < 2days, Li-ion battery storage is cheaper. For longer periods and greater capacities, then it is more economical to store hydrogen in underground salt caverns. In the modelling, the lowest cost for 3-day storage was £17/MWh for underground salt caverns and £41/MWh for Li-ion battery for 2-hour duration.²⁵

Additional research also agrees that batteries are much more efficient for short-term storage, but hydrogen could play a major role, especially for security of supply, to meet long-term storage requirements.²⁶

Using hydrogen carriers, for example, e-methanol which release hydrogen when reformed could also have a role in storage of hydrogen as well as being considered fuels in their own right (discussed in the next chapter). Whether the characteristics of such carriers (density or physical state at atmospheric pressure) can contribute competitively to decarbonising one or more sectors of the economy requires demonstrating.

The Department's '**preferred policy position**' is to support the long-term storage of hydrogen to help provide energy security and system flexibility. Further work will be needed to see how much hydrogen needs to be produced to meet these requirements and where it can be stored.

Questions

1. Do stakeholders think Northern Ireland requires dedicated hydrogen pipeline infrastructure? – explain your reasons.
2. Are there alternatives to underground caverns for high capacity, long-term storage of hydrogen that should be investigated?

²² Northern Ireland's Future Hydrogen Capability and Demand – matrixni.org, p.23

²³ Hydrogen Options for NI – nienetworks.co.uk p.10

²⁴ Northern Ireland's Future Hydrogen Capability and Demand – matrixni.org, p.80

²⁵ Avoiding Dispatched Down Wind with Green Hydrogen – economy-ni.gov.uk, p. 40

²⁶ Hydrogen in Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications – economy-ni.gov.uk, p. 47

5. USES OF HYDROGEN

Northern Ireland's Fourth Carbon Budget published by the Climate Change Committee (CCC) in March 2025 suggests hydrogen playing a small but important role in industry, for example for heat in the chemicals sector.²⁷ It continues that hydrogen can also be used as a feedstock for synthetic fuels for shipping and aviation and in larger off-road mobile vehicles in agriculture, as well as a possible role in low-carbon dispatchable electricity generation. The CCC envisages no role for hydrogen in buildings heating.

There are barriers to the use of hydrogen that need to be considered, including the discrepancy between potential production and low current demand. It is also closely linked to how we transport and store hydrogen (discussed in the previous chapter).

Hydrogen to Power

The combustion of low carbon hydrogen to produce electricity (Hydrogen to Power or H2P) could help with the decarbonising the power system and providing system flexibility. Options for developing this include centralised locations such as power stations or in a more decentralised fashion by using fuel cells or engines using hydrogen derived e-fuels with aftertreatment. In December 2024 the UK Government issued its government response to its Hydrogen to Power (H2P) consultation.²⁸ The consultation focused on the need for, and potential design of, a market intervention to support the deployment of H2P. However, as Northern Ireland is part of the Single Electricity Market (SEM), the H2P consultation was limited to GB. The UK government also recently issued a call for evidence on innovative hydrogen to power projects that could deliver more rapidly.²⁹

Taking into consideration the local context such as participation in the SEM and the size of the local power generation sector, the Department would welcome your views on what is the most appropriate approach for hydrogen to power here.

Industry

Research suggests that the most viable option for power for many industries will be via electrification.³⁰ However, there are energy intensive industries here that require power that direct electrification would struggle to provide. Hydrogen could assist industries that require high temperature industrial processes, such as the cement and chemicals sectors. This is a priority for industrial heat and processing in the Republic of Ireland hydrogen strategy.

In relation to industry, the Department's '**preferred policy position**' is for the use of hydrogen to be focused in hard to electrify sectors across industry, where economically viable.

²⁷ [Northern Ireland's Fourth Carbon Budget - Climate Change Committee](#)

²⁸ [H2P - Government Response - GOV.UK](#)

²⁹ [Innovative hydrogen-to-power projects: call for evidence - GOV.UK](#)

³⁰ [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications - economy-ni.gov.uk](#)

E-fuels

The Northern Ireland 4th Carbon Budget published by the CCC identifies that low carbon hydrogen combined with CO₂ can produce low carbon ammonia and synthetic fuels for shipping.³¹ Low carbon hydrogen can also be used to create Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAFs) and e-fuels.

Research suggests that a potential future use for green hydrogen is as a chemical feedstock used with our biogenic carbon feedstocks to create e-fuels.³²

The Department's '**preferred policy position**' is to encourage the use of hydrogen to produce e-fuels and SAFs as this is a significant opportunity for the hydrogen sector here.³³

Gas Network – Blending

In 2023 the UK government took a strategic policy decision to support blending of up to 20% hydrogen by volume into the Great Britain gas distribution networks, if enabled.³⁴ This limited and transitional measure will be subject to further trials and safety approvals. This is viewed as a measure to help the hydrogen sector and start to reduce carbon emissions. The UK government recently consulted on a minded to position to enable transmission blending of up to 2% hydrogen by volume in Great Britain.³⁵ A formal decision will be made following consideration of the responses.

The local gas distribution network, developed from the late 1990s, is a modern High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) based system which is viewed as being hydrogen compliant (subject to more testing verification) with less investment required to pivot to sustainable gases than older gas networks elsewhere. This situation will be kept under review by DfE in collaboration with the relevant Transmission and Distribution System Operators, the Utility Regulator and the HSENI as there is the potential for gas with a hydrogen blend to be delivered by the SNIP (Scotland to Northern Ireland Pipeline).

Recent research at an EU and global level has questioned the emission savings and potential costs of blending hydrogen into the gas network. A 20% blend of hydrogen would result in only a 7% reduction in CO₂ emissions (due to the lower energy per volume of hydrogen compared to natural gas).³⁶ Other more targeted uses could potentially achieve greater reductions in emissions.³⁷

Biomethane presents a significant opportunity here³⁸ with the ability to use this in the gas network at a more advanced stage than hydrogen and greater opportunity for it to be a longer-term solution rather than a transitional measure. Focusing the hydrogen produced locally on more targeted uses is also in line with the recent Climate Change Committee advice.³⁹

31 [The Fourth Carbon Budget - Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee](#) p.13

32 [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications - economy-ni.gov.uk](#) p. 8

33 [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications - economy-ni.gov.uk](#) p.60

34 [Hydrogen blending in GB distribution networks: strategic decision - GOV.UK](#)

35 [Hydrogen blending into the GB gas transmission network: consultation document - GOV.UK](#)

36 [IRENA Global Trade Hydrogen 2022 Report - irena.org](#), p.104

37 [Fraunhofer IEE Short Study H2 Blending EU- fraunhofer.de](#), p.7

38 [Evaluating the opportunity for utilising anaerobic digestion and pyrolysis of livestock manure and grass silage to decarbonise gas infrastructure: A Northern Ireland case study - ScienceDirect](#)

39 [The Fourth Carbon Budget - Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee](#), p.13

The Department's '**preferred policy position**' is to prioritise biomethane as the primary means of decarbonising the gas distribution network, of course depending on the commercial viability of biomethane.

More evidence is needed before a final decision on hydrogen blending can be taken.

Home Heating

The UK government is currently examining the evidence for the use of hydrogen in home heating and is due to consult on this in 2025.⁴⁰ The Climate Change Committee's 7th Carbon Budget,⁴¹ has advised that there should be no role for hydrogen in home heating, and further echoed this position in its Northern Ireland's Fourth Carbon Budget report in March 2025.⁴²

Research details a "low" chance of future scale of hydrogen for home heating here, citing electrification and heat pumps to be up to 6 times more efficient and more economically viable.⁴³ Broader studies of the role of hydrogen in home heating have also provided similar conclusions.⁴⁴

The '**preferred policy position**' of the department is to promote electrification and explore renewable gases such as biomethane as pathways forward to decarbonise home heating, and to divert focus to areas where hydrogen has the most potential impact.

Transport

The remit for the decarbonisation of transport policy rests with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI).

The context for using hydrogen in transport is changing with competing technologies, the cost of hydrogen, maintenance and refuelling facilities all being issues for transport providers.⁴⁵

Research suggests that the role of hydrogen in transport, including buses and HGVs, is changing.⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ The technology and charging infrastructure behind battery electric vehicles has developed at a much faster pace with all the key advantages of hydrogen being addressed. Battery prices have fallen dramatically and further predictions from Goldman Sachs are that by 2026, battery prices should reach \$80/kWh, which is roughly 50% of the 2023 price.⁴⁸

40 [Hydrogen heating: overview - GOV.UK](#)

41 [The Seventh Carbon Budget - Climate Change Committee](#)

42 [The Fourth Carbon Budget - Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee](#) p.13

43 [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications - economy-ni.gov.uk](#) p. 50

44 [A meta-review of 54 studies on hydrogen heating - ScienceDirect](#)

45 [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications - economy-ni.gov.uk](#) p. 54 -60

46 [Hydrogen In Northern Ireland: Future Costs, Challenges and Implications - economy-ni.gov.uk](#) p. 58

47 [The Fourth Carbon Budget - Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee](#), p.60-61

48 [Electric vehicle battery prices are expected to fall almost 50 percent by 2025 - goldmansachs.com](#)

However hydrogen will still have a role in the reduction of emissions in our transport sector,⁴⁹ including shipping,⁵⁰ HGVs and potential for larger off-road mobile machinery within agriculture.⁵¹ Hydrogen is already being used locally as a transport fuel in Fuel Cell Electric powered (FCEV) buses, and the UK Government has funded a number of projects which aim to address both the infrastructure and roll out of hydrogen HGVs.

Questions

- 1. What actions can the Department take to encourage the development of e-fuels as a use for hydrogen?**
- 2. What do you see being the sources of biogenic carbon for creating e-fuels?**
- 3. What other sources of carbon do you see as being deemed sustainable for use in creating e-fuels?**
- 4. Should hydrogen be used in the power sector in a centralised (power stations) or decentralised manner (fuel cells/engines) or both?**
- 5. Do you see a role for local hydrogen blending in the gas network? If so, please provide evidence for how it can be economically viable.**
- 6. In light of the cited research, how can hydrogen for transport in Northern Ireland be cost competitive?**
- 7. Are there other major uses for low carbon hydrogen that the Department should consider? Explain your reasoning.**
- 8. Are there sectors/uses where low carbon hydrogen should be used instead of other alternative renewable fuels?**

⁴⁹ [Hydrogen - IEA - *iea.org*](#)

⁵⁰ [DfT Maritime Decarbonisation Strategy - GOV.UK](#), p6

⁵¹ [Northern Ireland's Fourth Carbon Budget - Climate Change Committee](#) p.57

6. HYDROGEN SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

DfE established the Hydrogen Industry Working group in 2024 and it was consulted during the development of this consultation. Co-designing policy with industry is vital as we look to develop and implement a hydrogen policy that maximises our strengths, such as renewable electricity generation. This group has helped to co-design a vision for the hydrogen sector in Northern Ireland.

Our vision is to develop a competitive and resilient clean hydrogen sector that is an integral part of our energy system, enabling decarbonisation across our economy, promoting jobs and growth and providing local energy security and environmental sustainability.

The hydrogen sector here has made progress in the past few years with companies developing products, councils bringing forward innovative projects and new skills being developed. However, more will need to be done to help the sector meet its full potential with some of the key areas addressed below.

Invest NI

Supply Chains

Work recently undertaken by Invest NI on the ability of the local market to supply goods and services to the hydrogen value chain has highlighted that there is good foundational capability based on an assessment of companies registered in the region. This means the supply chain here is well suited to grow through strategic investment as the hydrogen industry develops, with opportunities to support local projects and export to other leading markets through:

- **Strong Foundational Manufacturing capability** – based on SIC codes c.700 companies in the region have the potential to manufacture equipment for the hydrogen sector, benchmarking in the top 4 UK regions on a turnover per capita basis.
- **Opportunity to bolster existing manufacturing capability to strategically position further development in strategic and high value hydrogen equipment** – such as hydrogen generation packages, electrical equipment, hydrogen storage vessels, and hydrogen compressors, along with fuel cell integration capability.
- **Strong Service Offering** – NI benchmarked in the top 3 UK regions for execution services, which primarily relate to installation and construction activity, i.e., the execution of projects.
- **Excellent research and development (R&D) ecosystem** – that acts as a catalyst for building new expertise and technology advancement, enables a knowledgeable workforce and the potential for the region to position itself as a hub for cutting-edge hydrogen research and development.

Invest NI continues to collaborate with local companies on their decarbonisation journey and with umbrella groups to develop the hydrogen sector here.

The Hydrogen Innovation Initiative (HII) aims to work with UK industry, government and investors to build support for a national hydrogen programme driving innovation and supply chain development. Invest NI partnered with HII to launch the Hydrogen Innovation Opportunity report⁵² which suggests that if the UK were to target and achieve a 10% share of the technology market, it could deliver £46bn per annum to the UK economy by 2050, including 410,000 jobs across the Hydrogen economy.

The Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan (LIDP) led by Invest NI is the region's first-of-its-kind decarbonisation project securing support from all 11 councils, DfE, DAERA, DfI, SONI, NI Chambers and Utility Companies. Funding was secured to develop a LIDP to de-risk the transition to net zero and provide a road map to ensure that local SME-based manufacturing remains relevant.

Development of Skills

The Matrix report "*Northern Ireland's Future Hydrogen Demand*"⁵³ reviewed the NI Skills Strategy⁵⁴ on the implications of the transition towards net zero for the engineering construction industry.

The report notes that in some subsectors there could be a skills shortage, with the need for more people with the existing skills, as well as needing to train people in new technologies and processes. For this reason, it is crucial that actions are in place to equip the sector with the right set of skills to enable its development.

Some work has already commenced on the development of new modules in green skills and sustainability with over 50 free courses available through the Skill Up programme.⁵⁵ Particular to Hydrogen, since September 2021, 14 courses supporting 400 individuals to upskill and reskill in areas including Hydrogen Energy Systems, Hydrogen Fuel Cell Technology, Hydrogen Safety and Hydrogen Applications, have been provided. Delivery is through the six local further education colleges, QUB and UU, from level 2 up to Masters. These courses have been the first of their kind offered across these islands.

The Department published the Green Skills Action Plan in May 2025.⁵⁶ This co-designed plan provides a comprehensive framework to guide Government, employers, educationalists, and individuals on what is needed to deliver the skills and the jobs for the future. Actions include reviewing the skills ecosystem to ensure it can effectively meet the evolving skills needs of the green sector, develop career pathways, and promote opportunities within the sector to create a future workforce pipeline.

52 [UK hydrogen innovation opportunity - hydrogeninnovation.co.uk](https://hydrogeninnovation.co.uk)

53 [Future Hydrogen Demand - matrixni.org](https://matrixni.org)

54 [NI Skills Strategy - economy-ni.gov.uk](https://economy-ni.gov.uk)

55 [Skill Up - nidirect.gov.uk](https://nidirect.gov.uk)

56 [Green Skills Action Plan - economy-ni.gov.uk](https://economy-ni.gov.uk)

City & Growth Deals (C&GD)

The Department's C&GD team is overseeing funding on several green projects including:

AMIC (Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre)

A £100m investment under Belfast Region City Deal AMIC has several initiatives relating to hydrogen innovation, skills and workforce including HyTech NI. HyTech NI is supported by the NI Complementary Fund (£15m) with contributions by project partners QUB, AMIC and Mid East Antrim Borough Council (MEABC), partners Ulster University and in collaboration with industry. MEABC are delivering a range of hydrogen projects in the Ballymena area. This will be an integrated package to develop a dynamic and competitive hydrogen economy for the region and includes:

- Development of a Hydrogen Innovation Accelerator to facilitate Hydrogen related R&D in key local capabilities via the procurement and deployment of specialist equipment in:
 1. Manufacturing Technology for Storage and Distribution
 2. Hydrogen Generation
 3. Hydrogen and eFuel Powertrains
- Development of a series of practical hydrogen demonstrators located in Ballymena and focused on:
 1. Gas network blending
 2. Transport/Mobility
 3. Skills & training

Hydrogen Training Academy

Northern Ireland has already made steps for transitioning its existing work force by providing specialist upskilling and hands-on training opportunities at the Hydrogen Training Academy (HTA) in Ballymena.

The HTA is a Mid and East Antrim Borough Council led public and private sector partnership project delivering essential hydrogen skills training from Level 2 (entry) to Level 7 (post-graduate).

Plans are now being developed to embed and increase capacity of the HTA facility by relocating to the ECOS facility in Ballymena under the scope of the £25m HyTechNI project.

Mannok Green Hydrogen Project (Mid-Southwest Growth Deal)

The Mid-Southwest partnership, local council, and Mannok are now exploring pathways to progress the electrolytic hydrogen production facility at Derrylin. The project remains a strategic priority for industrial decarbonisation in the region.

Shared Island Green Transport Corridor Project

The Department is part of a cross-border project to develop a Green Transport corridor for green hydrogen refuelling stations in Belfast and Dublin. It is being led by the Department of Transport and Department for Infrastructure with an aim to access Shared Island funding. This project has already undertaken a review of the safety case, a feasibility study and is now developing an outline business case and procurement strategy.

Questions

- 1. In your opinion how can policy aid the development of hydrogen-related supply chains?**
- 2. What skills or courses should be considered to train or upskill the industry workforce to develop the hydrogen sector?**

7. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

This chapter looks at specific regulatory issues for the hydrogen sector including economic regulation, health and safety and standards/certification.

Economic Regulator for Hydrogen

Activities such as transportation through pipelines of pure hydrogen is not currently regulated here. Consultation with stakeholders has highlighted a desire for this to change to provide clarity on the regulatory situation and potentially access more funding streams.

Making provision for hydrogen and appointing a regulator would require changes to the relevant legislation e.g. The Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and The Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

The Department's '**preferred policy position**' is to appoint the Utility Regulator⁵⁷ as the economic regulator for hydrogen. We will continue to consider the implications of this in consultation with the Utility Regulator and other key stakeholders.

Health and Safety

Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) is the lead body responsible for the promotion and enforcement of health and safety at work standards in the north. Whilst there is no specific health and safety legislation in relation to hydrogen there is a legislative framework which can be applied to the hydrogen sector:

Some of the health and safety regulations that can be applied include:

- Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003;
- Pressure Systems Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004;
- Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015;
- The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010; and
- Pipelines Safety Regulations (NI) 1997.

If Hydrogen blends, or 100% Hydrogen is introduced into the existing gas network in the future, then the following legislation will need to be amended to reflect this:

- Gas Safety (Management) Regulations (NI) 1997; and
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations (NI) 2004.

Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification Scheme

It is the intention of the UK Government to launch the Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification Scheme⁵⁸ (LCHCS) UK-wide in 2025 although initially on a voluntary basis.

⁵⁷ [Utility Regulator - uregni.gov.uk](http://UtilityRegulator-uregni.gov.uk)

⁵⁸ [Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification Scheme - GOV.UK](http://LowCarbonHydrogenCertificationScheme-GOV.UK)

For hydrogen producers here the scheme will allow access to new low carbon markets, report progress towards decarbonisation targets to corporate stakeholders, demonstrate eligibility and compliance for subsidy schemes, or the certificates can be used to meet government obligations and prove compliance with regulations.

It is intended that the Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification Scheme would be delivered across the UK by the Low Carbon Contracts Company (LCCC) and at this time to include NI. However, this position is non-binding and subject to further review by DfE as the scheme design progresses to its mandatory phase.

To provide clarity the initial phase of the certification scheme will focus on certifying UK produced hydrogen for UK offtakers, however DESNZ is working on a 'pathway to international alignment' for both the Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard and the Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification Scheme which is intended to include NI. This document will set out how the scheme and standard will expand and/or change to align with international counterparts, as EU alignment will be a key anchor for the UK's potential future export market should hydrogen production outstrip domestic demand.

Rather than develop a local specific hydrogen certification scheme it is the Department's '**preferred policy position**' to adopt the Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification Scheme, however as noted, the details of the scheme are still being designed and the Department will continue to engage with DESNZ to ensure the scheme meets the needs of local producers of hydrogen and should any critical issues arise, this position may be reconsidered.

Questions

1. What are the priority regulatory issues for the local hydrogen sector?
2. Do you agree with the Department's intention to appoint the Utility Regulator as the economic regulator for hydrogen?
3. Do you agree with the Department's intention to adopt the Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification scheme?

8. SUMMARY OF PREFERRED POLICY POSITIONS

Please find below a list of the Department's '**preferred policy positions**' included in this consultation document:

- To ensure parity with the rest of the UK (and signatory partners on the international stage) on the standard of hydrogen being produced here, the Department will continue to promote the Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard.⁵⁹
- The Department will focus on existing UK and island of Ireland wide funding streams as the means to support low carbon hydrogen production in the region.
- To reflect the role of hydrogen in our future energy mix, the Department will produce a hydrogen target focused on energy security.
- The Department is open to dedicated hydrogen infrastructure in the longer term, provided it is economically viable.
- The Department will support the long-term storage of hydrogen to help provide energy security and system flexibility.
- In relation to industry, the Department will support the use of hydrogen being focused in hard to electrify sectors across industry where economically viable.
- The Department will encourage the use of hydrogen to produce e-fuels and SAFs.
- The Department will prioritise biomethane as the primary means of decarbonising the gas distribution network. More evidence is needed before a final decision on hydrogen blending can be taken.
- The department will promote electrification and explore renewable gases such as biomethane as pathways to decarbonise home heating, and to divert focus to areas where hydrogen has the most potential impact.
- The Department will appoint the Utility Regulator as the economic regulator for hydrogen.
- Rather than develop a local specific hydrogen certification scheme the Department will adopt the Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification Scheme.

⁵⁹ [UK Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard - GOV.UK](#)

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

The relevant impact assessments have been conducted for the policy proposals. Currently the Department does not anticipate the policy to result in any adverse impacts for any of the Section 75 categories or those who live in rural areas. If any potential issues are raised as part of this consultation process, we will review our impact assessments at that stage and amend if required. The draft equality screening assessment has been published alongside this public consultation.

Consultation on a Sustainable, Regional Approach for the production, storage, transport and use of Hydrogen as a fuel

Department for the Economy – Launched September 2025

Consultation Deadline: 18th December 2025

Summary

This consultation seeks views on the department's draft preferred policy positions on the production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen as a fuel, the regulatory framework and how to develop the local hydrogen sector. A summary of the preferred policy positions is in section 8 of the consultation document.

Consultation Description

Hydrogen can play a key enabling role in energy security on our path to net zero by 2050 and create a new economic opportunity with the creation of alternative fuels, new technologies and the development of skills that will be needed to serve this market both here and across the world.

Responses to the consultation from stakeholders will inform the final policy on hydrogen. This will in turn feed into the development of an action plan for the local hydrogen industry.

Policy Consultation Questionnaire – Online Submission

Production

1. Do you agree with the Department's support for the Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard?

Yes – The UK's Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard sets out what constitutes as low carbon hydrogen and provides adequate thresholds and sustainability criteria which hydrogen producers must meet in order to access supports and have credibility. It makes sense for NI to adopt this standardised approach.

2. Is it economically and/or environmentally beneficial to utilise otherwise dispatched-down wind generation for hydrogen production? – Explain your reasoning, highlighting any disincentives/perverse incentives not to and the circumstances in which you see temporal and geographic correlation as being important.

Yes, we would agree that it is economically and environmentally beneficial to utilise otherwise dispatched down wind generation for hydrogen production.. The reason for this is as follows:

- It is otherwise un-tapped energy potential that is costing the economy;
- We have an opportunity to utilise that energy/electricity to create another energy vector which can be utilised across various sectors and applications, helping to decarbonise some of the harder to electrify sectors.

3. Are there grounds (economic, environmental, social equity) for reforming the grid related charges for connecting electrolyzers as controllable loads?

We would agree that there are strong grounds for reforming the grid related charges to connect electrolyzers as controllable loads. Electrolyzers have the capability of acting flexibly, consuming untapped and abundant renewable energy and reducing demand when the electricity grid is under strain.

Economic benefits would include: Unlocking investment, reducing connection costs and improving project viability. It would improve the electricity grids' efficiency and reliability and would lead to economic growth as strategic projects with regional impact are delivered.

Environmental benefits would include: Production of green hydrogen helping to decarbonise the grid, increase the percentage of power generation and consumption which is renewable and provide green fuel for other hard to electrify or decarbonise sectors. Grid balancing with renewables will stabilise the grid and reduce the reliance on back up fossil fuel usage. It will also reduce curtailment, helping to cut down on wasted renewable energy which is generated and currently dispatched-down.

Social equity benefits would include: Reform would ensure electricity grid connection charges are no longer disproportionately high (and therefore prohibitive) in relation to new clean energy projects. Customers would see lower costs, improved efficiency and more energy security.

4. What are the minimum conditions (e.g. scale, off-take market, supply chain, etc.) that would need to pertain to make a "private wire" connection to renewable power generation for electrolytical production of hydrogen viable?

Currently not viable due to high production, storage and compression costs, especially when compared to traditional fossil fuels which are cheaper and more readily available. Reliability of electrolyser technology is also a challenge with any projects delivered to date. Therefore, all stages of the hydrogen value chain would need to be primed for this to operate effectively, from the scale and volume of production, to a readily available market of off-takers and customers and all the way along the supply chain. Additional minimum requirements would also include developing the skills and expertise required to develop, scale, operate and maintain the hydrogen economy. The DfE Green Skills Action Plan launched in 2025 is a good starting point for this but needs support, momentum and delivery to have the desired impact.

5. Do you agree with the Department's focus on UK and Ireland-wide funding streams to support the local industry?

While there is a place for accessing UK and Ireland-wide funding streams, a local (i.e. Northern Ireland) focused funding stream is also imperative to the speed and scale at which the opportunity for low carbon hydrogen can be exploited. A DfE or Northern Ireland specific funding stream would help to de-risk the significant up front capital investment required to ready the region for hydrogen production and use and is critical to meeting any future targets which are agreed. A NI based funding stream would need to be flexible and support projects in each area of the hydrogen economy (i.e. not just new technologies, processes or innovations) to ensure we maximise the opportunities for the region.

6. What sources of evidence, for example where demand growth is to arise from, should be used to help establish an energy security target for hydrogen in the region?

- Demand potential by sector
- Existing potential off-takers and future potential off-takers
- Production capability linked to dispatch down constraints and curtailment for green hydrogen via electrolysis
- Production capacity based on all other methods of production
- Overall NI renewables capacity and targets and align hydrogen production accordingly

7. What would be a realistic target for low carbon hydrogen production in NI by 2035?

Unsure, would depend on what the evidence/data demonstrates.

Hydrogen Transport and Storage

1. Do stakeholders think Northern Ireland requires dedicated hydrogen pipeline infrastructure? Please explain your reasoning.

Not initially for two reasons:

- Transporting hydrogen via tube trailers would still appear to be sufficient for the transport needs we have and is more flexible than a dedicated pipeline;
- A dedicated hydrogen pipeline would be extremely costly and with safe operating distances required, could prove difficult.

2. Are there alternatives to underground caverns for high capacity, long-term storage of hydrogen that should be investigated?

Underground caverns would appear to present the best opportunity for long term, high capacity storage, however there are significant challenges in delivering on this due to both environmental and economical constraints.

There are a range of options which should be considered including: Large scale pressurised tanks, liquid hydrogen (cryogenic) storage and potentially solid stage storage (such metal hydrides). It is likely that a mix of different storage types will present the most practical, efficient and economical solution.

Uses of Hydrogen

1. What actions can the Department take to encourage the development of e-fuels as a use for hydrogen?

There are a number of actions which would help encourage development of e-fuels:

- Flexible financial support for establishment, development and delivery (including R&D activity) of projects which address this requirement;
- Incentivising the use of e-fuels as an alternative to traditional fuels;
- Supporting projects all along the value chain (i.e. projects which have a role to play in any part of the hydrogen economy from early stage concepts and technology design, to large scale production, storage and distribution projects) which contribute to decarbonisation of transport.

2. What do you see being the sources of biogenic carbon for creating e-fuels?

Unsure

3. What other sources of carbon do you see as being deemed sustainable for use in creating e-fuels?

The other sources of carbon which are likely to be most sustainable in creating e-fuels include: Biogenic CO₂ (i.e. Biomass power plants such as StreamBio in Ballymena), ethanol production (such as the work being done in ports) and large scale energy from waste plants. These are likely to be the most sustainable methods, are quite well advanced/developed and present an opportunity for us to use abundant feedstocks we have in NI. Carbon capture (DAC) is still quite expensive (and energy intensive) and not as well developed, but would also present a very sustainable option in future as the technologies improve and the cost reduces through scaling.

4. Should hydrogen be used in the power sector in a centralised (power stations) or decentralised manner (fuel cells/engines) or both?

Both – the flexibility of hydrogen as an energy vector lends itself to being used in a variety of different ways and a mix of solutions will be required to decarbonise areas of our power generation sector, transport sector and other off-takers to have a significant impact.

5. Do you see a role for local hydrogen blending in the gas network? If so, please provide evidence for how it can be economically viable.

Yes. The HyTech NI project proposed under the NI Complementary Fund by QUB, UU and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council proposed to demonstrate this solution in partnership with Kinecx Energy (formerly Firmus Energy) and B9 Energy. This project will help to provide evidence of how the approach can work, what impact it can have and how it can become economically viable in the longer term. Reduction in green hydrogen production costs is the most likely means of making this approach economically viable.

Blending hydrogen into the gas network can be economically viable in future if policy, pricing and technical frameworks recognise hydrogen's value. Support would help to minimise the cost of safety upgrades, production/supply and other associated infrastructure costs.

Economic viability is constrained by the cost of green hydrogen relative to natural gas and the investment needed for network readiness and appliance compatibility. However, staged blends (ie. up to 20% like in the HyTech NI project) can reduce transition costs while building supply chains and operational experience.

Other key drivers in reaching economic viability include:

- Dynamic electricity tariffs to avoid curtailment credits, lowering the cost of green hydrogen production;
- Reform of grid connection and use of system charges for controllable loads would reduce costs;
- Development and delivery of blend zones/projects to demonstrate the capability and provide confidence.

6. In light of the cited research, how can hydrogen for transport in Northern Ireland be cost competitive?

Supports and incentives to accelerate green hydrogen production would help to increase production capacity and capability, create a hydrogen ready production system and a security of supply and ultimately reduce the cost of producing, storing and transporting green hydrogen for end users, making it more cost competitive as a fuel.

7. Are there other major uses for low carbon hydrogen that the Department should consider? Explain your reasoning.

None other than those outlined in the consultation documentation.

8. Are there sectors/uses where low carbon hydrogen should be used instead of other alternative renewable fuels?

None other than those outlined in the consultation documentation.

Hydrogen Sector Development

1. In your opinion how can policy aid the development of hydrogen-related supply chains?

There are numerous benefits of having a policy framework in place to support hydrogen supply chains and hydrogen sector development including:

- National strategies and targets to focus the attention and effort, including roadmaps or action plans which set out specific routes to achieve targets. Strategies and policies also provide long term certainty for industry, stakeholders and investors;
- Financial incentives tied to agreed strategy, policy and action plans can help to incentivise project development, delivery and investment required to deliver on targets. These can include tax credits and subsidies, grants or loans, revenue support mechanisms and innovation funding;
- Demand side support – Policy can mandate usage of green fuels in hard to electrify sectors and along with appropriate supports and incentives, this can accelerate development of the sector and ultimately progress towards agreed targets;
- Public procurement policy and fossil fuel bans can also accelerate the use of green fuels;
- Policy can help to support infrastructure development and implement appropriate regulatory measures – Including co-ordinated development of hydrogen sector and supports, appropriate regulatory and certification mechanisms, safety standards and usage protocols.

2. What skills or courses should be considered to train or upskill the industry workforce to develop the hydrogen sector?

There are courses available from a number of education and skills training providers which range from Level 1 to Level 7+, focusing on various different parts of the hydrogen sector and the skills required to develop, operate and future-proof it. Skills training and academic provision exists for everything from basic gas safety, handling and management; Equipment manufacturing and innovation; Maintenance and servicing; Production, transport, storage and distribution and various other related disciplines.

Projects such as the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council led Hydrogen Training Academy (supported by academic partners such as QUB, UU, University of Birmingham, Belfast Metropolitan College and Northern Regional College) have helped to support specific, hands on skills training delivery to more than 300 trainees since 2022 at Levels 3 and 5 (OCN accredited) on:

- Hydrogen Safety
- Hydrogen Production, Storage and Distribution

- H2 Fuel Cells for Transport
- H2 Gas Safe (Operating a Hydrogen Facility)
- Hydrogen Technologies and Applications
- KnowHy Hydrogen Production
- Green Technologies – Hydrogen Production Systems and Solar PV

Development of further courses, course materials and training at various different levels (and focusing on a wide range of hydrogen economy related subject areas, uses or applications) is critical. Ideally this would be delivered as a private/public partnership to ensure alignment with industry needs which would help to up-skill and re-skill the Northern Ireland economy to maximise our capabilities in the area, including developing expertise across both the supply and demand side and all areas of potential use.

Projects such as the HyTech NI project will help to accelerate skill development and importantly, demonstrate the capability of various hydrogen technologies and applications, both areas which are critical to developing the demand-side of the hydrogen value chain and creating a viable, sustainable and profitable hydrogen economy in NI.

Projects such as the I4C Innovation and CleanTech Centre will also help to develop skills, expertise, projects and innovations which will make up part of the hydrogen and CleanTech sectors in future and with clearer policy, targets and support schemes, this will be accelerated and more strategically aligned with our wider net zero and sustainability targets across NI.

Regulatory Framework

1. What are the priority regulatory issues for the local hydrogen sector?

- Requirement of a dedicated, fit for purpose regulatory framework and associated policies which simplify and enable the process of hydrogen production and use;
- Appointment of an appropriate regulatory body to manage and govern the policies and procedures above;
- An appropriate certification scheme for hydrogen production and use, again which simplifies and provides certainty in the process rather than complicates it;
- A clear set of support mechanisms and schemes which help to deliver on projects, develop the wider hydrogen economy and help to accelerate a just energy transition;
- Planning and consenting – A clear hydrogen planning policy is required so that proposed projects are able to develop and get to market without long processing times;
- Lack of infrastructure development and integration – Regulatory clarity is required on how new hydrogen networks can integrate with existing gas and electricity grids in future;
- Safety standards and public perception – Clear safety regulations and standards exist but require further clarity, development and integration into existing and new policy frameworks. Public acceptance will be accelerated by robust safety protocols and clear communications.

2. Do you agree with the Department's intention to appointment the Utility Regulator as the economic regulator for hydrogen?

Yes, for a number of reasons:

- They have existing remit and expertise for gas, electricity (and water), making hydrogen a natural addition;
- Hydrogen will interact directly with gas and electricity networks and therefore extending the UR remit would avoid duplication by a new entity;
- They provide independence and non-ministerial department accountability;
- They will continue in their core duty of promoting the short and long-term interests of consumers;
- They are experienced and capable of aligning Northern Ireland with wider UK regulatory practice and supporting cross-border cooperation and market integration.

3. Do you agree with the Department's intention to adopt the Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification scheme?

Yes, for a number of reasons:

- The Low Carbon Hydrogen Certification scheme provides, credibility, market access and consumer protection while also ensuring alignment with wider Climate and Net Zero goals;
- It would ensure investor confidence, long term credibility, provide market access in UK and EU and support eligibility to unlock investment opportunities and funding;
- It would provide environmental integrity, ensuring hydrogen follows strict carbon intensity thresholds and contributes to emissions reduction;
- It would provide customer protection, providing transparency for consumers, businesses and funders;
- It would ensure strategic and policy alignment with UK and EU which is critical to compliance, market access and long term energy security.

Council/Committee:	Environment & Economy Committee
Date:	08 December 2025
Report Title:	Labour Market Partnership Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development
Approver:	Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on activities delivered by the Mid and East Antrim Labour Market Partnership.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Department for Communities' Labour Market Partnership initiative aims to improve employability outcomes and Labour Market conditions by working through coordinated, collaborative, multi-agency partnerships. Councils, as part of the initiative, have each established a local Labour Market Partnership to work collaboratively on an Action Plan, act as Secretariat to the Partnership and report through to the Department for Communities who provide the funding for the programme.
- 2.2. Mid & East Antrim Labour Market Partnership (LMP) was established in March 2022, working in partnership with employers and stakeholders to support those seeking employment, provide upskilling support for better employment, improve access to the Labour Market for those with disabilities and promote skills pathways.
- 2.3. In December 2024, the Environment and Economy Committee Members approved the Labour Market Partnership Action Plans for 2025-2027. The initial letter of offer of £402,365.44 for 2025-2026 was issued in May 2025 with a subsequent Letter of Offer for the full 2025-2026 funding of £512,101.47 issued in November 2025. Confirmation of the full funding has enabled implementation of a number of programmes that were put on hold until this point.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. The MEA LMP Action Plans are focused on four key priorities below:
 1. Economic Inactivity

2. Long Term Unemployed
3. Skilled Labour Supply
4. Disability

The Regional LMP also requested that the following priorities were considered in the plans:

- Supporting action on climate change by enabling green jobs
- Addressing the disability employment gap
- Utilising opportunities arising from City & Growth deals
- Supporting the aims and implementation of the Skills Strategy; and
- Promoting diversity and inclusion.

3.2. Update on LMP Action Plan – September – December 2025

Interventions	Update
Community/Employer-led Skills and Up-skilling Initiatives	<p>Education and Training – 13 participants have completed the Level 3 Education and Training upskilling programme and achieved the Level 3 Award in Education and Training with a new cohort commencing in January 2025. 5 participants have increased hours in current employment and 2 participants have gained new employment.</p> <p>Plant Operations – 11 individuals have completed a qualification in Counterbalance Forklift at Woodhill Training Limited during September - November 2025 with a further 7 booked for training before 31 December 2025. To date 7 participants have entered into employment.</p> <p>Phlebotomy – Cohort 2 is now recruiting, with the project commencing in January 2026. 8 participants will have the opportunity to develop their skills in the growing healthcare field specialising in Phlebotomy.</p> <p>Youthwork – The project aims to provide participants with job specific skills required to access employment in Youth Work. 13 participants commenced the Youthwork Academy in September and are working towards their OCN Level 2 in Youthwork. The participants have completed the residential element of the</p>

	project and will now move onto developing their skills in preparation for assessments.
Medical Administration Academy	8 participants were recruited onto the academy in September 2025. 3 participants have now secured employment to date, with 4 participants attending interviews with local GP practices over the coming weeks.
Insight Youth	This 24-week programme for young adults aged 16 - 24 who are economically inactive or unemployed, will offer inclusive training on job specific skills and provide placement opportunities with employers to bridge skills gaps and create employment opportunities. Recruitment is ongoing and the programme will commence in early January 2026
Classroom Entry Academy 25/26	Following an extensive screening and interview process, 13 candidates were carefully selected to participate. All 13 participants successfully completed the week-long Academy, demonstrating outstanding commitment and enthusiasm throughout. Reflecting both the high calibre of candidates and the strong demand from local schools, 10 individuals secured employment shortly after completion. The remaining 3 continue to receive tailored one-to-one support to help them identify and secure suitable positions within the education sector.
Classroom Upskilling Academy 25/26	The Classroom Assistant Upskilling Academy commenced in September 2025, and 15 participants are currently working through the course.
Adult Social Care Upskilling	This Academy including a Level 4 qualification commenced on 24 October with 11 participants enrolled.
Cleantech 2024-2025	23 participants registered for the Cleantech Academy. 12 participants in Cleantech Electrical have achieved a total of 31 qualifications to date. 9 Cleantech Electrical participants have moved into higher paid employment to date. 8 participants are currently completing their

Cleantech Electrical 2025-2026	<p>qualifications on the Cleantech Electrical Academy.</p> <p>3 participants enrolled on the Hydrogen Academy and 2 successfully completed the course achieving the Level 3 Award in Hydrogen Technologies. 1 has gained employment with the remaining participant achieving a unit accreditation as they did not complete all course work.</p> <p>16 participants have now enrolled in the 25/26 Cleantech Electrical Academy and the first course in Solar Panel Installation and Maintenance will commence in December 2025</p>
Graduate Disability Programme	<p>The academy has now concluded with 7 participants enrolling and 5 completing the level 3 OCN Employability. A total of 15 employers were engaged via inclusion training and providing placement and employment opportunities. A total of 7 participants availed of a work placement, 5 of those 7 completed the qualification as well as the placement. 5 participants have secured paid employment.</p>
Work Connections	<p>Work Connections offers unemployed/economically inactive residents with disabilities a route to employment via accredited qualifications, work placements and employability support. 19 individuals are now engaged, and training is due to commence in both Ballymena and Carrickfergus before the end of November.</p>
SparkWorks	<p>10 participants registered for the project and have completed their initial assessments, skills scans and technical interviews. Online classes commenced in September, and all participants are making good progress through the modules.</p>
Wellbeing 4 Work - 50+	<p>This project will complete delivery on 9 December 2025. 14 participants have attended sessions over 12 weeks in Ballymena and Larne to improve their physical, mental or emotional wellbeing through a range of structured activities</p>

	to enable them to progress to employment/ volunteering or further training.
Childcare Level 3 Upskilling Academy	12 participants have been recruited, and attendance to date has been excellent. Participants will complete the qualification in early 2026.
Childcare Level 5 Upskilling Academy	15 participants have been recruited and attendance to date is very good, all participants remain on the programme.
Placement Insights Creative Industries	23 young adults took part in the 8-week packed programme delivered by Cinemagic. The young creatives had the opportunity to dive into filmmaking and production, idea generation, scripting and bringing stories to life with the production of a short film taking place in September.
JBO Employability Outreach & Job fairs	<p>JBO Outreach Events – LMP Officers have held outreach events in all Jobs and Benefits Offices within the boroughs, to engage with residents and promote LMP Academies/Projects with 40 participants attending the outreach events</p> <p>A Job Fair was held In Carrick Civic Centre on 21st October 2025. 15 employers and 10 Support Agencies exhibited and engaged with 95 attendees.</p> <p>LMP Officers hosted a Networking Breakfast in SHOT Café, Ballymena on 6th November, 38 staff attended from local businesses and support groups.</p> <p>Over 50's Job Fair - LMP Officers are currently engaging with staff from MEA's Agewell Partnership to host an over 50's Jobfair on 28 January 2026.</p>
Activate Your Curiosity	Delivery is well underway for this year's Activate Your Curiosity programme with a range of competitions, visits and workshops in place. The flagship event will take place on Tuesday 20 January for 400 Year 10 students in the Braid.

	Plans are underway for a STEM event aimed at Year 9 students in the Amphitheatre Leisure Centre, Larne in June 2026.
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4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1 **Financial** – The Department for Communities provides funding of £512,101.47 to implement the LMP Actions Plan. Officers have also secured additional resources from Michelin Development Fund, Clanmll and Private sponsorship to provide this wide-reaching employability, skills and careers delivery. There is no cost to Council and the agreed funding fully supports 3 full-time staff as part of the LMP delivery team. Officers are working on an easement bid to DfC to secure further funding for the delivery of enhanced employability and skills provision and will update on the outcome of this bid at the next committee.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. MEA Labour Market Partnership continues to meet bi-monthly to review progress.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Members are asked to note the Letter of Offer received from Department for Communities and the progress on the implementation of the Labour Market 2025 - 2026.
- 6.2. Quarterly updates will continue to be provided to this Committee.

7. Appendices / Links

N/A

Council/Committee:	Environment & Economy Committee
Date:	08 December 2025
Report Title:	LEP General Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development
Approver:	Jonathan Mc Grandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the ongoing work of Mid & East Antrim Local Economic Partnership (LEP).

2. Background

- 2.1. Members were previously advised in October 2022 that following a review of Invest NI, DfE and Invest NI commenced development of a Sub-Regional Economic Plan for NI in late 2023 in partnership with key economic stakeholders.
- 2.2. The Sub-Regional Economic Plan was launched by the then Minister for Economy, Conor Murphy on 1 October 2024. The Plan outlined how the Department will work with Invest NI, Councils and other key stakeholders to establish LEP's with an allocation of £45 million available over 3 years across Northern Ireland with £1.503 million per annum available to Mid & East Antrim.
- 2.3. Nine meetings of the Mid & East Antrim LEP have taken place to date, 29 January 2025 at Ecos Hub, Ballymena, 19 February in Larne Town Hall, 20 March in Carrickfergus Town Hall, 2 April in Ecos Hub, Ballymena, 7 May 2025 in LEDCOM, Larne, 3 June 2025 remotely via Teams and 9 September in Carrickfergus Town Hall, 7 October in Ecos Hub, Ballymena and 20 November in LEDCOM.
- 2.4. Six meetings of the Task and Finish Working Groups took place by thematic area as follows
 - Workspace Development and Enterprise & Growth: 22nd & 30th September.
 - Innovation & Productivity and Alignment with City Deal: 18th September & 1st October.
 - Community Wealth Building & Town Centres: 26th September & 2nd October

These meetings focused on further project discussions to inform the narrative for the working draft action plan and consensus was reached on projects that should be merged and projects which could be ruled out. Resulting in a working draft action plan of 13 projects under the agreed high level strategic priorities.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. As advised in the Committee update report on 27 October 2025, LEP members agreed that more time was required to gather further information to refine the draft action plan. In addition, DfE representatives advised they needed time to provide feedback to the LEP on the current proposals following the work of the task and finish groups and recommended the draft action plan needed further detail to be ready for submission and approval.
- 3.2. Members were also advised in the Committee report on 27 October that the draft action plan would be tabled for Environment and Economy Committee on 8 December 2025. However, following feedback from DfE and the recent LEP meeting on 20 November, there is still further work to be done including project assessments to enable LEP Members to reach consensus on the final action plan to present at Committee for approval.
- 3.3. Since the LEP Meeting on 7 October, Officers have been engaging with the DfE Subsidy Control Advice Unit to understand state aid and de minimis implications for each proposed project. Initial guidance has been received; however, further work will be required to ensure alignment and correct routes are followed with each project and further liaison with the Subsidy Control Advice Unit may be required.
- 3.4. Officers have also been engaging with Council's Procurement Manager to understand the procurement routes in line with Council's procurement policy and associated governance and regulations to further inform whether projects are eligible to proceed to a final action plan.
- 3.5. At the LEP meeting on 20 November, Officers presented the update on Procurement routes and advised on projects which required further information on scope and defined deliverables to enable Officers to gather all relevant guidance from Procurement.
- 3.6. DfE representatives provided feedback on each project proposal on the working draft action plan. This resulted in some projects requiring reconfiguration or further development to clearly define the ask for budget allocation and how they meet the primary target and spend objectives of the fund. This work is also imperative to ensure all projects adhere to all stipulations and Managing Public Money NI (MPMNI).

- 3.7. On 24 October Council received a draft letter of offer which included an Annex which further sets out the primary target of the fund which is to:

"Increase Invest NI (INI) supported companies by 10% (from a baseline of 1,428 to 1,571, i.e., 143 new supported companies). This contributes to the wider strategic objective of a 25% increase in "new to Invest NI" local companies by 2027."

The Annex further provides the Regional Balance Fund Targets, with additional metrics to monitor and the Regional Balance Fund Outputs and Outcomes (short term and long term) attached in Appendix 2.

- 3.8. The next step agreed at the 20 November meeting was to draft a project scoring matrix for circulation to LEP Members for feedback. This matrix will be used to assess all projects to determine those that reach the final action plan and meet the targets as attached in Appendix 2.
- 3.9. LEP members were also informed of Council's intent to procure an independent consultant. The role of the independent consultant would be to provide strategic analysis on the current working draft action plan. Consideration of the wider context and alignment with spend objectives, regional balance and outputs of the fund to inform development of a final action plan.
- 3.10. Officers attended a LEP Council workshop organised by DfE on 21 October. The workshop provided an opportunity to learn about the work going on across all the LEPs.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Financial – The budget had been previously confirmed as £1.503m per annum over a 3-year period although Council have been made aware that delays by DfE in establishing LEPs may result in funding for Year 1 2025/26 not being able to be carried forward. Officers through SOLACE Economic Development group are working with DfE to scope alternative approaches to ensure no funding is lost to the programme. A draft Memorandum of Understanding has been received and is currently under legal review, a draft Letter of Offer with Annex has been received, final Letter of Offer is awaited following submission of the Mid & East Antrim LEP Action Plan.
- 4.2. Human Resources – SMT have approved recruitment of two dedicated full-time posts, fixed term up to 31 March 2028. The posts are 100% funded via DfE. It is essential that these posts are recruited as soon as possible to progress all aspects of the MEA LEP.
- 4.3. Timeframes – DfE have noted to LEP members the time remaining under the fund to utilise the allocated budget. It is imperative to reach consensus

on the final action plan as soon as possible in order to spend within the timeframe.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. Officers devise a draft project scoring matrix and circulate for LEP Members feedback to enable projects to be assessed, consensus reached for Council to approve the action plan for submission to DfE.

6. Recommendation or Decision

6.1. Elected Members are asked to:

- Note the updates and ongoing work of LEP to reach a final action plan

7. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 – Draft Regional Balance Fund Letter of Offer

Appendix 2 – Annex to Regional Balance Fund Letter of Offer



Department for the
Economy

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**Local Economic
Partnerships**

**The Regional Balance Fund Letter of Offer
between the Department for the Economy and
XXXXXXXXXXXX District Council.**

XX October 2025



DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version	Issue Date	Reason For Update
0.1	05/09/2025	Initial Draft for Internal Review
0.2	09/10/2025	Initial Draft Update
1.0	22/10/2025	Three Year Letter Final Version for Issue



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**Local Economic
Partnerships**

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From: [DfE]

Date:

To: [District Council]

REGIONAL BALANCE FUND SCHEME IN RESPECT OF LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS

INTERMEDIATE (ACCOUNTABLE) BODY – [District Council]

DEPARTMENT FOR THE ECONOMY ASSIGNMENT OF FUNDING – TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. Further to the **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed on X**, the Department for the Economy (DfE) has agreed to provide funding to ([DISTRICT COUNCIL]) to deliver a scheme of funded projects under a Regional Balance Fund (RBF) supported by the area's Local Economic Partnership (LEP).
2. The purpose of the RBF is to support the advancement of priority local economic projects recommended by the LEP and supported by the Council, which will address key economic indicators including improving productivity, as set out in the Annex to this letter.
3. DfE is assigning £45 million across 3 years to fund local economic projects under this scheme by means of annual grants to Councils to administer as Accountable Bodies under the terms set out in the MOU. With regards to the allocation for [DISTRICT COUNCIL] across the period to end of March 2028, this is set at £XXXXX.

General conditions

4. In consideration of [DISTRICT COUNCIL] entering into the agreement set out in this letter which applies from 31 May 2025 until 31 March 2028, DfE is prepared, subject to the terms and conditions set out in this letter to make available to the Council the following funding under the auspices of the RBF to enable the Council to implement the scheme:
 - A) A resource grant (not exceeding £) of vouched and approved expenditure; and
 - B) A capital grant (not exceeding £).
5. This 3-year 2025/28 funding offer is made on the basis of the financial forecasting information issued by [DISTRICT COUNCIL] to DfE for the LEP 2025/28 action plan which was approved by DfE on XXXX.
6. Any Annexes to this letter shall be deemed to be incorporated in and form part of this letter and references in this letter to any provisions of this letter shall be deemed to include, where the context so admits or requires, references to provisions of the Annexes.

Eligibility of projects and costs

7. The eligibility criteria for individual projects to be funded from this annual allocation have been agreed as per agreement of the annual action plan for the [DISTRICT COUNCIL] LEP and aligned with the spending objectives, targets and outcomes in the attached Annex.
8. Councils can accept other evidence that they deem appropriate from project promoters to demonstrate eligibility provided this aligns with the intended spending objectives, targets and outcomes of the scheme. All evidence that the Councils gather should be retained for audit purposes.
9. Eligible costs have been agreed as follows:



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Partnerships**

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- a. Capital expenditure related to procurement and delivery of projects within the remit of the scheme which contribute to spending objectives, targets and outcomes per the attached Annex.
 - b. Resource expenditure related to delivery of projects within the remit of the scheme which contribute to spending objectives, targets and outcomes per the attached Annex.
 - c. Administrative costs to administer this scheme exclusively supporting LEPs, that have been agreed with DfE in advance as reasonable, will be deemed eligible for recovery from the overall allocation of funding outlined at point 4A (resource allocation) and which are not deemed ineligible per point 10.
10. The following costs are not considered to be eligible for project funding:
- a. Administrative resource (i.e. staffing) which is already funded through other means, i.e. deployed and funded to support other activity (unless the relevant time is apportioned) and is not exclusively supporting other activity.
 - b. Funding for projects which are duplicative. Councils should engage with DfE to seek further advice.
 - c. Funding for projects in the following sectors which are excluded:
 - i. Primary Agricultural Production
 - ii. Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors
11. A maximum of £X capital and £X resource grant can only be approved and paid for work completed or partially completed within 2025/26, with the remaining grant to be paid for work completed or partially completed within 2026/27 and 2027/28.

This is the total amount assigned and must not be exceeded.

12. With regards delegated limits in relation to Council authority, expenditure and approval of individual project level business cases, DfE will not set a specific maximum financial threshold for individual project business cases at a Council level regarding resource or capital expenditure, to be submitted to DfE for

approval other than the conditions outlined in DAO (DoF) 05/25 Departmental Delegations / Requirements for DOF Approval and the DfE specific delegations within, provided other eligibility criteria and responsibilities set out in the MoU and in this Letter of Offer are met. Councils can engage with DfE if there are concerns or queries on this approach.

13. A minimum project level financial threshold has been set at £20k per individual project per year to ensure projects are of sufficient scope and scale to impact outcomes. Projects below this level must be agreed specifically in writing with the Department.
14. Spending on ineligible projects will not be accepted and will not be funded by DfE. In the unlikely event a Council issues payment to a supplier for a project for which funding is not eligible per the scheme requirements, as per previous line this will not be eligible for drawdown from DfE and the Council will have to assume the financial impact or contractual consequences. Overspending will not be funded by DfE.
15. DfE shall transfer funds to [DISTRICT COUNCIL] to cover eligible payments. Eligible funding, per the requirements set out previously and in the Letter of Offer, will be drawn down from DfE by the Councils for in-year, in arrears on the basis of expenses, for delivery of projects via suppliers.
16. Templates for submitting claims/making payments will be agreed by DfE and issued to the Council.
17. DfE will conduct such administrative and on-the-spot checks of the expenditure declared by the Council as deemed appropriate. The Council should retain this information to hand.
18. [DISTRICT COUNCIL] will notify DfE immediately of any irregularity, fraud or theft (attempted, suspected or actual) or any circumstance which has caused or is

likely to cause, a loss or misuse of funding. A full and detailed report in writing will be required.

19. DfE reserves the right of access to such information and documentation as is necessary to fully investigate any instance of fraud or irregularity (prevented, suspected or actual). Following a Departmental investigation all instances of fraud will be reported to the police, criminal proceedings may be instigated, and this contract may be terminated, if deemed appropriate.

Council responsibilities

20. The Councils will be responsible for control and delivery of the RBF within the broad policy and financial parameters set by DfE, i.e. within their annual allocation. The Councils' responsibilities include the following:
 - a. Submitting, on behalf of the LEP, a 3-year action plan demonstrating how areas of focus will contribute to scheme spending objectives, targets and outcomes. Submitting associated financial forecasting and profiling information for DfE engagement and approval in a timely manner to allow budget allocations to be set for the upcoming year.
 - b. Appoint a delivery Senior Responsible Officer, with responsibility for all elements of procurement, audit, delivery and reporting. The Senior Responsible Officer is to hold responsibility for the procurement and delivery of agreed projects funded by the grant, and as such will manage procurement processes for suppliers (including procurement call, selection process and award) according to their Council's Procurement Policy. This should align with the requirements of the NI Public Procurement Policy for each project.
 - c. Any associated procurement should take into account social value considerations in line with DoF PPN/01/21, Social Value in Procurement.
 - d. Responsibility for the project selection, application and approval process against the eligibility criteria set by the Department and determining what evidence is required to demonstrate eligibility. Any areas of clarity can be discussed with the Department.

- e. Ensure compliance with the requirements of Managing Public Money NI. In particular, ensure the business case process is followed for each instance of funding a project under the auspices of the scheme. The Council should ensure that the business case demonstrates clear alignment with spending objectives, targets and outcomes, development of metrics and support monitoring and evaluation at an aggregate level.
- f. Be responsible for Scheme delivery including delivery of Projects funded by the scheme.
- g. Sending appropriate Letters of Offer to project promoters.
- h. Approving and making payments to project promoters.
- i. Ensuring a timely Internal Audit Review is conducted on Council administration of the scheme and compliance with the MoU / Letter of Offer and provide DfE with the outcome.
- j. Taking adequate measures to safeguard against irregularity, fraud or theft. The Council will maintain up to date policies and procedures which comply with all current legislation.
- k. Ensuring appropriate data sharing arrangements are put in place to support all elements of scheme delivery and audit reviews, Post Project Evaluation (PPE) etc.
- l. Carry out appropriate regulatory and statutory impact screenings for individual projects funded under the scheme.
- m. Agreeing a process for clawback with the Department.
- n. Provide information on request to the Department to enable them to complete appropriate post payment verification checks in line with the letters of offer.
- o. Agree a process with the Department for submitting claims and receiving payments.
- p. Be responsible for developing and managing any appeals process.
- q. Provide the Department with regular updates in terms of expenses and delivery monitoring reports as agreed.
- r. Each Council is responsible for ensuring this financial assistance fully complies with either the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022 or the EU State aid

rules, when the beneficiary enterprises fall within the scope of Article 10 of the Windsor Framework.

- s. Providing all requested expenses and other reporting information in a timely manner.
- t. Conducting PPE against scheme and project metrics, outcomes and baselines for a) each individual project funded under the scheme b) the overall suite of projects funded across each year by the Council and c) full PPE on overall completion of the 3-year scheme and at intervals beyond this as set out by DfE.
- u. Conduct interim evaluation of administration and delivery of scheme by end of year 1 to assess progress, lessons learned and implement improvements for future years to ensure continued value for money into year 2 and 3.
- v. DfE will retain the right to clawback any monies as a result of fraud or error or deemed to be ineligible in respect of the eligibility criteria. In such instances the appropriate action will be determined on a case-by-case basis. The Parties agree to consult in relation to this.
- w. [DISTRICT COUNCIL] shall be responsible for investigating instances of potential fraud or error, including the completion of any clawback procedures.
- x. [DISTRICT COUNCIL] will be expected to fully participate on any collaboration/networking events organised by the Department.
- y. [DISTRICT COUNCIL] will be expected to display the DfE Local Economic Partnerships Logo on all official related documentation.

21. To confirm your acceptance of the terms and conditions please sign the Appendix to this letter and return it to me. A copy should be retained for your own records.

22. If you have any queries, please contact DfE at RegionalEconomy@economy-ni.gov.uk

GIULIA NI DHULCHAOINTIGH

Appendix 1

FORM OF ACCEPTANCE

CEO

[District Council]

being the Intermediate Body referred to in this Agreement hereby accepts this assignment of funding on the terms and conditions set out herein including compliance with the monitoring, control, financial and reporting arrangements.

I understand that providing wrong or misleading information is an offence and any such information may be used in any subsequent criminal investigation. I further understand that the information provided in this application may be made available to other Government Departments / Agencies for the purposes of the prevention and detection of crime.

I am hereby authorised to accept this assignment of funding on behalf of the above Intermediate Body.

Signed:

Name in block capitals:

Date:

NOTE

Please do not detach this Acceptance Form from the Assignment of Funding Letter (This letter is issued in duplicate and one complete copy should be returned to the Department for the Economy as the Managing Authority).

ANNEX TO THE REGIONAL BALANCE FUND LETTER OF OFFER

1. REGIONAL BALANCE FUND SPENDING OBJECTIVES

Overarching Objective:

- To enable Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) to address regional imbalance in economic development through productivity improvement.

Supporting Objective:

- To ensure LEPs have the flexibility to identify local issues that inhibit productivity growth, rather than setting a common programme for all areas.

2. REGIONAL BALANCE FUND TARGETS

Primary Target:

Increase Invest NI (INI) supported companies by 10% (from a baseline of 1,428 to 1,571, i.e., 143 new supported companies). This contributes to the wider strategic objective of a 25% increase in "new to Invest NI" local companies by 2027.

Additional Metrics to be Monitored:

- Number of INI supported companies (by council area)
- Scale: INI supported employment per supported company
- Sector: Number and output of businesses in highest productivity sectors (IT/tech, financial services, professional, scientific and technical activities, manufacturing)
- Wages impact: Hourly median wage for all employees by place of work.

3. REGIONAL BALANCE FUND OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Short term Outputs and Outcomes

- Projects delivered that address local barriers to starting and scaling of tradable businesses.

- Projects delivered that target barriers to start-up of businesses in high productivity sectors.
- Improved partnership between DfE, Councils, and Invest NI focused on tradable businesses.
- Increased collaboration with provision of sector specific support in areas of low current capacity.
- 10% increase in INI client companies, especially in areas of lower current performance.
- Tradable businesses account for a greater share of employment, particularly in areas of lower current performance.
- Increased number of businesses in high productivity sectors (target: 5% increase, or 595 new businesses).
- High productivity sectors account for a greater share of employment.
- Projects which target training and/or qualifications where there is a clear link to productivity improvement (engineering and digital skills).
- Projects which target competitiveness of tradable businesses.
- Increased employment in tradable sectors which have a wage premium compared to non-tradable private sector employment.

Longer-Term Outcomes/Impacts:

- Improved productivity performance across Northern Ireland.
- Ensuring that gains in improved productivity feed through to wages and are reflected in improved private sector wages.
- Increased median wages by area of work, reflecting improved private sector wages.
- Enhanced employee wellbeing and job satisfaction.
- Greater capability in councils and local stakeholders to identify and deliver productivity-improving interventions.
- Improved policy through partnership working and peer learning.

Summary table of Objectives, Activities, Outputs and Outcomes

Objective	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
Increase number and scale of tradable businesses	DfE/INI participate in LEPs, identify barriers, direct funding	Projects delivered, improved partnership	10% increase in INI client companies, more tradable businesses in low-performing areas	Improved productivity
Increase businesses in high productivity sectors	Identify/support sector entrepreneurship	Projects targeting high productivity sectors	5% increase in such businesses	Higher productivity, higher wages
Increase median wages	Collaboration with employability partners	Training/qualifications linked to productivity	More employment in high-wage sectors	Wage gains reflect productivity
LEP flexibility	LEPs identify local barriers/projects	Annual action plans	Projects tackle local barriers	Productivity improvement at local level

Draft Forward Plan – Environment & Economy Committee (October v21)

1. Planned Agenda Items Next meeting

Items		Purpose
26 Jan 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development Action Report Ballymena Business Improvement District Update Local Economic Partnership Update Go Succeed Update Greenisland Regeneration Governance Report Carrickfergus THI Governance Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting

2. Items to be programmed

Item	Purpose
Business Cases (DC)	Report for Approval
Business Cases for Fleet for year ahead	Report for Approval
Tenders	Report for Approval